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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2019-02-26

Deposited version:

Publisher Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Sá, A. L. (2018). From Collected to Collective: strategies for social and political participation through the use of alternative media in Equatorial Guinea. In Ana Stela de Almeida Cunha, Miguel de Barros, Rosana Martins (Ed.), "Hispano-Lusophone" community media: identity, cultural politics and difference. (pp. 189-203). Bellaterra: Institut de la Comunicació, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Further information on publisher's website:

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CHAPTER 13

From *Collected* to *Collective*: Strategies for Social and Political Participation Through the Use of Alternative Media in Equatorial Guinea

Ana Lúcia Sá

Ramón Nsé Esono Ebalé, Josimar Oyono Eseng and Moises Nvumba are responsible for three alternative forms of media concerning Equatorial Guinea: *Locos TV* ['Mad TV'], *Radio Macuto* and the radio station *La Voz de los Sin Voz* ['The Voice of the Voiceless'].¹⁰¹ None of them are currently living in Equatorial Guinea¹⁰² and they all suffer threats because of exercising their freedom of speech and their criticism of Teodoro Obiang Nguema's dictatorship.

These examples represent alternative media, as they are in opposition to the official media of Teodoro Obiang Nguema's regime. They are not apologists of the regime, nor do they follow its official guidelines. They do not silence international events that could incite the population into action against the dictatorship or against the bad living conditions that exist in the country, despite the fact that Equatorial Guinea has fewer than one million inhabitants¹⁰³, and is the third largest producer of oil in Sub-Saharan Africa with an income per capita of 20200 USD. They work against the transformation of citizens into spectators who are a product of traditional media institutions that do not offer education, and that are dominated by an agenda determined by a regime¹⁰⁴. Indeed, freedom of expression is highlighted by *Radio Macuto*: '*libre expresión*' ['free expression'].¹⁰⁵

The 2013 Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders identifies Teodoro Obiang Nguema as a 'predatory censor' and the country ranks 166th on this index¹⁰⁶. Being a tacitly proclaimed dictator¹⁰⁷, he is at the head of a regime that controls the right of association (whether political, social or cultural) and the scarce media that does exist.

Teodoro Obiang Nguema became the president of Equatorial Guinea on 3rd August 1979, following the Freedom Coup that overthrew his uncle Francisco Macías Nguema, who as of 1968 had been the first Equatoguinean president, and who was subsequently executed. Teodoro Obiang Nguema's regime is a continuation of Francisco Macías' *Nguemism*, characterized by a cult of personality personalism and the privilege of the president's horizontal family to accede to the benefits of the State. It is also known as *Obiangnguemism*.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Locos Tv de Jamón y Queso*, n.d.; *Radio Macuto*'s first webpage was <http://radiomacutoge.blogspot.com/>, changed in February of 2013 to <http://radiomacuto.info/>. In the same month, Moises Nvumba started the radio broadcast from London. The radio station can be listened to on *Radio Macuto*'s page on <http://station.vocast.com/510c05ed560f5/>.

¹⁰² Ramón Esono left the country in 2011 for personal reasons and Josimar Oyono Eseng left in 2006. His dissidence means he lives in an indefinite place and that he is being chased by the regime.

¹⁰³ According to the Equatoguinean government webpage (Equatorial Guinea, n.d.), the population is around 1,700,000 inhabitants. The World Bank (n.d.) estimated the population at 736,300 inhabitants in 2012 and the United Nations Development Programme (n.d.) as 740,500 inhabitants.

¹⁰⁴ For the role of the media in Africa, especially considering the radio and the transmission of knowledge and education, Cf Esipisu & Khaguli, 2009, pp. 21-22, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012c.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Report Without Borders, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Teodoro Obiang explains the meaning of the word dictator to the Spanish television TVE as 'the person who dictates the laws', being himself, in that case, a dictator. Cf Calles, 1986.

To the Equatoguinean social scientist Okenve Ndo (2009), the country is ruled by a ‘dictatorial clan’, referring to the Esangui clan, to which both presidents belonged. Equatoguinean authors, such as Justo Bolekia Boleká (2005) and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel (2009), associate the dictatorship with the privilege of the Fang ethnic group, who supposedly have more access to the rewards of the State and of the family, possessing the real power in the country. For Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, a very well-known writer and blogger, the regime is an ethnocracy, motivating the divisions within the country’s ethnic groups, such as between Fang and Bubi, or Fang and Ambô, just to say a pair of examples.

In his *Diccionario Básico, y Aleatorio, de la Dictadura Guineana*, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel (2011) states that the different groups live apart and that the Fang dominate key institutions and places within the State structure, such as the army, contributing significantly to the lack of social cohesion.

Although the ‘ethnic question’ is not at the center of the debate in this chapter, it is worthy of a mention as it is a fracturing issue in *Obiangnguemism* that is used to collect the people and turn them into divided and repressed subjects. To be collected means that they are controlled by the regime and are brought together in the name of a country where they experience a lack of social recognition, political participation and expressions of belonging.

In this sense of being collected, the theme of the collected Equatoguinean people is a major topic in Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel’s texts. For him, the dictatorship turned the country’s inhabitants into ‘*los desheredados del África más empobrecida*’ [‘the dispossessed of the most impoverished part of Africa’], (Ávila Laurel, 2011), who coexist with the economic, social and political elites who are dispossessing the people of the country. The dictatorship consists not just of political repression, but also social and economic repression.

This idea of dispossession, linked to the collected people, is also developed in his blog, *Malabo*¹⁰⁸, that he began on invitation from the magazine *Frontera D*, based in Spain, and with the purpose of writing about the living conditions of the people in his country.¹⁰⁹

His first blog entry from 30th November 2009¹¹⁰ discusses Teodoro Obiang Nguema’s longstanding regime, comparable to a monarchy. Living in Equatorial Guinea, he was the sole blogger to openly critique the dictatorship - a regime he profoundly opposed, to the point of starting a hunger strike in February of 2011.

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel started this hunger strike in protest of Teodoro Obiang Nguema’s dictatorship, and in order to attract the attention of foreign governments to the conditions Equatoguinean people face in their country. An official delegation from Spain was there at the time, and Juan Tomás Ávila called to their attention issues regarding health, justice, education, agriculture and the exclusion of a huge percentage of the population from basic living conditions. As he recalls in his blog texts, the people in Equatorial Guinea don’t live in a republic, where, theoretically, they could accede to the State. They aren’t citizens¹¹¹, but subjects of a regime. The country is not a republic, but a regime personalized around the president and with monarchic features, since the president has two possible heirs among his sons, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue and Gabriel Mbega Obiang Lima.

¹⁰⁸ Cf Fronterad revista digital, 2013b.

¹⁰⁹ As he explained to me in an interview (Barcelona, 31st October 2013).

¹¹⁰ Cf Fronterad revista digital, 2013c.

¹¹¹ It is not my intention to discuss the concepts of the citizen and citizenship in this chapter, nor to deepen the debates around civil society and citizenship in Africa, often biased with Eurocentric analysis, rather preferring the discussion of social and political participation. As Ferguson (2007, p. 89) points out, “civil society has emerged as a keyword, ubiquitous in both scholarly analysis of “democratization” and the “real-world” practices they seek to describe and explain”. Adding that, “the current (often ahistorical and uncritical) use of the concept of “civil society” in the study of African politics obscures more than it reveals, and, indeed, that it often serves to help legitimate a profoundly antidemocratic transnational politics” (Ferguson, 2007, p. 91).

Due to pressures upon him and the people who protected him during this hunger strike, he felt forced to abandon his country in the same month, only returning to the city that also lends its name to his blog, two years later (Sá, 2011).

2011 is a symbolic year in the history of the country, for two reasons. Firstly, for the first time, the president of Equatorial Guinea was also the African Union chairperson (from 31st January 2011 until 29th January 2012). It was not a calm mandate. The events that became known as the ‘Arab Spring’, with the overthrow of the Tunisian President Ben Ali, the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the invasion of Libya and killing of Muammar Gaddafi, occurred while Teodoro Obiang Nguema was at the head of the African Union. Still, there was silence around these facts in his country. A journalist for Equatorial Guinea’s Radio and Television Juan Pedro Mendene was suspended when he mentioned the turbulence in these African countries.¹¹²

Secondly, 2011 was a symbolic year because the Equatoguinean virtual public sphere changed substantially. Thinking in terms of the Equatoguinean virtual public sphere, it is worth mentioning that this is a country with few internet users¹¹³ and with significant numbers of emigrants.¹¹⁴

At the beginning of 2011, only two blogs by Equatoguinean people were known, *Malabo*, by Juan Tomás Ávila, and *Opinión desde Guinea Ecuatorial* [‘Opinion from Equatorial Guinea’], by Eyi Nguema.¹¹⁵ The Equatoguinean virtual sphere (or that concerned with Equatorial Guinea) was complemented by the pages *Asodegue*¹¹⁶, run by Adolfo Fernandez Marugán, from Spain, and *guinea-ecuatorial.net*.¹¹⁷ This last page was created by Equatoguineans living in Germany, such as the exiled activist Samuel Mba Mombe, who is currently living in Cameroon. Samuel Mba Mombe explains that *La Diaspora* was the name of the first website made in 1998 by Equatoguineans living abroad with the purpose of providing information about what was happening in the country. The page disappeared in 2002. The page *guinea-ecuatorial.net* was created simultaneously to defend the freedom of expression and these pages were pioneers (Ebalé, 2013d).

These pages had (and have, in the case of *guinea-ecuatorial.net*) news, opinion texts and statements of political parties, among other genres, but they are not blogs. The blogs are the internet and communication technology privileged in this chapter, as they are spaces of freedom of speech, emphasizing the right people have to speak and to be heard. Since 2011 the informative blog by Samuel Obiang, *Malabo News*¹¹⁸ and the political and historical opinion blog *Monte Bata*, by Bokung Ondó Akum¹¹⁹ have been born, and these provide a glimpse of the Equatoguinean blogosphere. The first is an example of a blog by a person living in Equatorial Guinea, and the other of a writer living abroad. There are however three online platforms that deserve emphasis.

Locos TV was created in June of 2011 with the intention that, “*Qué nadie diga el día de mañana que estaba borracho cuando los locos se enfrentaron a la dictadura*”¹²⁰ [‘Nobody can say tomorrow that was

¹¹² Report Without Borders, 2011.

¹¹³ It is worth mentioning that Equatorial Guinea occupies the 227th spot on the number of Internet hosts in comparison with other countries (lower ranked are Liberia, Chad, Bouvet Island, Palau and Marshall Islands). In 2009, there were 14,000 Internet users in the country. Cf Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.

¹¹⁴ The most complete work on Equatoguinean migrations is Aiixelà, 2011. She analyses the different reasons for people leaving the country and the ensemble of those migrants in the countries where they live, focusing on the effects of this migration in Equatorial Guinea in terms of social and political participation.

¹¹⁵ Eyi Nguema’s blog is hosted in the Spanish newspaper *El País*. Cf *El País.com*, 2011. The author ceased publications in June of 2011. Cf Sá, 2011.

¹¹⁶ Cf Asociación para la solidaridad democrática con Guinea Ecuatorial (*Asodegue*), n.d. *Asodegue* has not been updated since December 2012, due to economic reasons.

¹¹⁷ Cf *Guine Ecuatorial.net*, n.d.

¹¹⁸ Cf Obiang, n.d. *Malabo News* exists since July 2012.

¹¹⁹ Cf *Monte Bata*, n.d. The blog exists since August 2012.

¹²⁰This sentence used to appear in the blog entry page, but it disappeared in 2013. Cf *Locos Tv de Jamón y Queso*, n.d.

drunk when the mad faced the dictatorship”]. One year later, *Radio Macuto*¹²¹ was born. It is *La Voz de los Sin Voz* [‘The Voice of the Voiceless’], the motto of the radio station linked to the blog. The voiceless are, in this case, the ‘*sufrido pueblo*’ [‘suffering people’], those who don’t have access to the State.¹²²

Also in 2011, the exiled human rights lawyer José Luís Nvumba started a collection of essays entitled ‘¿*Estamos encaminados hacia la democracia?*’ [‘Are we on the road to democracy?’], suggesting certain advances that will have to come about in civil society, if democracy is to emerge in the country. Having devoted his political action to struggle against the Obiang Nguema dictatorship, he reaches the conclusion that an end to the inhumane and arbitrary regime that steals people’s rights and freedoms (including those of ethnic groups) should be reached through the intellectual’s strong opinions and the actions of the youth, as a means of showing a belief in the possibility of ending the dictatorship.¹²³

The youth José Luís Nvumba refers to is taking action through the internet and communication technology and is using them as a community that shares the same objectives: to denounce what is happening in Obiang Nguema’s dictatorship (and because of it) and to give people their right to information.¹²⁴

The bloggers offer alternative sources of information on authoritarian regimes that control the mass media (Etling, Faris & Palfrey, 2010), and this is significant given the symbolism in the names of these blogs. *Locos TV* and *Radio Macuto* are conceptualized as two expressions of mass media – one being a TV channel and the other a radio station, despite the fact that both are blogs. Both the television and the radio stations defend freedom of speech and count on a team to make them viable. For example, Ramón Esono Ebalé assumes he is only the cartoonist for the TV, and Mulá Omar¹²⁵ is the chief. On *Locos TV* we see cartoons representing people and events of the social and political life of Equatorial Guinea. The majority of them are accompanied by a letter signed by Ramón Esono Ebalé.

Josimar Oyono Eseng is the director of *Radio Macuto* that has reporters in Equatorial Guinea and abroad, that makes it possible for different people to publish different documents, sharing ideas with a wider audience, implying the international community. The format of the blog *Radio Macuto* has a mixture of two objectives: the spread of information and the participation of all those with opinion texts. It has broadened opportunities for dissidents to publish their texts and is an alternative source of information on daily events or events that otherwise would go unreported. *Radio Macuto* publishes texts by known authors, anonymous ones, or by authors using an alias.¹²⁶

On September of 2012, Josimar Oyono Eseng wrote:

“Ahora, la gente ni se da cuenta, pero hay un viento muy fuerte en forma de un binomio que sopla contra la dictadura de Malabo: Locos TV y la Radio Macuto, cuya misión principal parece iluminar con un foco a ese ladrón que ha llegado a ser Presidente de la República, gracias al Golpe de Estado de 1979” [‘Today, people don’t realize it,

¹²¹ Macuto is a Spanish word for backpack, as *Radio Macuto* was the radio that the guerillas used on their backpacks to stay connected to the world beyond the fight. The name is intended to highlight *Radio Macuto*’s ability to carry information everywhere (as Josimar Oyono Eseng told me in a brief interview through Facebook chat, on 23rd July 2013).

¹²² Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012f., 2012g.

¹²³ Cf Mañana, n.d.

¹²⁴ Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012e

¹²⁵ In this case, Mulá Omar is an anonymous Equatoguinean activist who chooses to use the name of the Taliban leader because he is wanted by Obiang Nguema’s regime, that considers a dissident person a terrorist.

¹²⁶ As can be seen in the following examples, there are texts by anonymous authors complaining about the lack of freedom and criticizing the ‘false State’. Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012g, 2012a; Mitogo, 2013; [Sala, 2013](#) or [Akum, 2013](#).

but there is a strong wind blowing against Malabo's dictatorship in the form of *Locos TV* and *Radio Macuto*, whose main mission is to shed light on the **thief** who came to be President of the Republic, thanks to the *coup d'état* in 1979'.¹²⁷ (author emphasis)

For Ramón Esono Ebalé, Josimar Oyono Eseng and Moises Nvumba, it is the dictatorship that undermines the social relations, that promotes divisions, that obscures ways of living, promoting sexual harassment, torture at police stations, a lack of education, healthcare and the provision of basic needs (food, drinking water, housing). The dictatorship is linked to the appropriation of the country (its resources and peoples) by Obiang Nguema's family and also to the absence of social and political participation and any recognition of the people. These themes are those that are most often addressed in the blogs. The lives of the elites contrast with the lack of basic social infrastructures and with the destruction of the people's houses and agricultural lands when they are located in sites considered strategic for buildings such as hotels or private houses for members of the regime. Despite evoking the discourse of modernization, claims by the Regime that the State promotes key areas such as basic social infrastructures are unfounded.¹²⁸

In geostrategic terms, the country is located in a vital region for defence of the big corporations' policies and practices. One of the major critiques regarding this subject is that the oil revenue is not reflected in people's standard of living. Furthermore, oil extraction has done nothing to break down the feeling of abandonment that people experience. The fact that Obiang Nguema's regime is internationally protected by countries such as the United States of America, Spain, China, North Korea, Israel and Morocco, also strengthens feelings of abandonment in those who are fighting for change. One example is the political party Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS, to use its Spanish acronym; *Convergencia Para la Democracia Social*), that advocates for a political solution to ending the dictatorship. CPDS is the only opposition political party with a parliamentary seat, occupied by Plácido Micó.

One relevant feature of some texts published in *Radio Macuto* and others by Ramón Esono Ebalé in *Locos TV* about the elections in Equatorial Guinea, is the statement against the legitimization of a dictatorship through participation in what they consider a masquerade - the election polls.¹²⁹ Political participation and the notion of political participation in Equatorial Guinea are still dependent on what political parties (legal, non-recognized by the government, in the country or abroad) can do. For someone who is dissident and wants to speak out against the dictatorship, or against its social and psychological consequences, a political party functions like an umbrella or a platform that people can join, and feel backed by peers, despite the risks of persecution, threat and arrest. However, there are proposals emerging from other platforms. CPDS' seat in parliament is called the 'seat of discord'¹³⁰, it was won in 1999 and renewed in the following elections, such as those of 26th May 2013.

Electoral polls are criticized as a farce because of their lack of transparency, thereby putting into question the participation of opposition political parties.¹³¹ The multiparty system changed nothing concerning the concentration of power in the hands of the president and his family. The First Lady Constancia Mangué, for example, is the most powerful woman in the country, giving herself the

¹²⁷ Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012i.

¹²⁸ Cf Ebalé, 2012d, 2011b.

¹²⁹ Some texts criticizing the elections and the masquerade they involve are available at *Locos TV* and *Radio Macuto*. For example, Ramón Esono Ebalé explains the reasons not to vote. Cf. Ebalé, 2013c., and an anonymous group of young activists state against the elections. Cf. Movimiento de los jovens activistas e indiganados de Guinea Ecuatorial, 2013., Ramón Esono Ebalé inclusively wrote a text in exclusive for Radio Macuto, cf. JamónyQueso, 2013.

¹³⁰ The critiques of the 'seat of discord' started in September 2012. Cf Ebalé, 2012c.

¹³¹ Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012g, and on the quote "*No nos quedan dudas de que constituir un partido político en una República Bananera, como Guinea Ecuatorial, equivale a un CERO colocado a la izquierda*" ['We do not doubt that to form a political party in a Banana Republic, such as Equatorial Guinea, is equivalent to a ZERO place at the left'] (*La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012g).

right to expropriate lands in Rebola, near Malabo.¹³² Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangué, the eldest son is the Second Vice-President (a position that does not exist in the Constitution), and is in charge of security and is a former Minister of Agriculture. Another son, Gabriel Mbega Obiang Lima, is the Minister of Mines, Industry and Energy. Both sons are mentioned as the possible heirs of Obiang's presidency and both are criticized in *Locos TV* and in *Radio Macuto*.

Criticism of the dictatorship, or complaints about poverty or lack of water are perceived as disobedience and can result in arrest (or at least, intimidation). This, according to *Radio Macuto*, is 'enmity to the homeland'. This expression is common in a series of texts entitled '*La política del hablen pero en voz baja*' ['The politics of speaking out, but with bated breath']. On a daily basis, people are unable to speak out – the country lives with a regime of impunity, the dictatorship divides the people, and there is terror, brutality and expulsion of African immigrants, both legal and illegal.¹³³

These texts relate to an attribute that is determinant to the notion of collected people, in this case, underlining a collective feature: fear.

One unifying factor common to most inhabitants of the country since the dictatorship of Francisco Macías Nguema is terror.¹³⁴ There is a shared memory of tyranny and fear and the collective memory is widely dominated by fear since the Francoist colonization. Teodoro Obiang Nguema incites fear in the collective memory by using selected episodes of terror that serve to remind people that he is in control of their lives.¹³⁵

Silence and fear are two feelings that go hand by hand in Equatorial Guinea, when considering the critique of the regime. The Internet is a tool that makes spreading the word easier for those who live in the country. *GuinGuinBali*, a Spanish online magazine, published three texts by Tiniebla or Tinieblas ['Darkness'], an alias of someone who lives in Malabo.¹³⁶ The author justifies the need for an alias. He writes under the name of Tinieblas to avoid retaliation:

“porque entenderán que en un sistema dictatorial, los que quisieran hablar criticando la situación inhumana de opresión, son los primeros caldos de cultivo” [Darkness, because you will understand that in a dictatorial system, those who want to speak criticizing the inhuman situation of oppression are the first breeding grounds] (Tiniebla, 2013b: n.p).

He decided to write because he tired of the 'grips of fear', silencing the 'everyday realities (deaths, robbery, famine, disease, corruption, arbitrary arrests)'.¹³⁷

These authors, by their texts and ideas, force the debate on what can be collective as a means of action and affirmation. *Eclipse*, a project by Ramón Esono Ebale, is an example of considering the collective memory to build the future of Equatorial Guinea. Launched in September of 2013 with

¹³²Cf Ebalé, 2012d; La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial, 2012b.

¹³³ Cf La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial, 2012g.

¹³⁴ Cf Aixelà, 2011: 55-56.

¹³⁵ Obiang Nguema uses the violence of the Francisco Macías Nguema years to justify his own regime's acts of terror, thus appealing to collective memory while suppressing opposition activity (Aixelà, 2011). Examples from the 1980s include arbitrary detentions, disappearances, prohibiting of the right to association and the violation of health rights, alongside encouragement of the consumption of alcoholic beverages and drugs (Liniger-Goumaz, 1986). Similar violations of fundamental rights are known to be prevalent today. One example is the assassination of Padre Jorge Bitá Kaeko in 2011, which has yet to be explained. Another is the arrest of Clara Nsegue Eyí in Malabo, in May 2013, and her transfer to the prison of Mongomo, away from her family and from possibilities of comfort (in Equatorial Guinea, prisoners eat what their family or charity institutions give them).

¹³⁶ Cf Tiniebla, 2013b, 2013a, 2013c. The first two texts are a reflection on the elections that took place on 26th May 2013 and on the fact that the president is omnipresent in the country and in the campaign. The last is an indignant text about the football game between Equatorial Guinea and Spain (on 16th November 2013) and the award that Teodorín Obiang planned to give to the players, 5 million euros that could be used for building schools or hospitals.

¹³⁷ Cf Tiniebla, 2013b.

the aim of democratizing the country, *Eclipse* is intended to be a group that promotes pacific actions, depending on solidarity between people and fighting for a different Equatorial Guinea with a campaign for public dialogue. Relying on anonymous people, Ramón Esono made it visible through his blog.¹³⁸ It called for the building of an archive of historic memory, the restitution of collective memory and the opening of a public debate on those Equatoguinean people missing as a result of the Francisco Macías Nguema dictatorship.

Eclipse is one of the special series that exist on *Locos TV*. Another is the imaginary interview of real Equatoguinean people, like Juan Tomás Ávila or the President Teodoro Obiang Nguema.¹³⁹ In other cases, real interviews are also a strategy for *Radio Macuto* to give a space to the people, as was the case with Humberto Riochi, speaker for the Movement for Bioko Island Self-Rule (MAIB, to use its Spanish acronym; Movimiento para la Autodeterminación de la Isla de Bioko), Wenceslao Mansogo, of the CPDS and Alfredo Okenve, the leader of an NGO based in Bata.¹⁴⁰

Among the strategies used for giving a voice to the people, is the posting of statements from associations and political parties and of press releases, which assume the role of disseminating the news. Through the selection and posting of these text genres, *Radio Macuto* participates in the processes of providing information and of participation in public matters. It is a new form of information giving and opinion making in Equatorial Guinea that uses the internet to fight for the freedom of speech and, ultimately, for social recognition and justice. Statements made by political parties such as the MAIB, the Popular Union or CPDS, and the news of the civic platform CEIBA appear on a page that also publishes institutional statements by the '*Asociación de Mayores de Ebibeyin*' ['Association of the Elders of Ebibeyin'] or of Equatorial Guinea. Comments are made on the political life of the country that perhaps could not be published elsewhere.

Since 27th September 2013, *Radio Macuto* has had a weekly feature, 'The idiot of the week'¹⁴¹, run by César Augusto Iyanga Mitogo. He presents himself as a student of the National University of Equatorial Guinea (UNGE, Spanish abbreviation for *Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial*) and his texts are about the lack of freedom in Obiang's regime.¹⁴² He collaborates with *Radio Macuto*¹⁴³ and with *Locos TV*.

This is not the only example of dialogue between the online platforms that advocate freedom of speech. They maintain a coherent organization and a constant connection to the streets, challenging the defeatist analysis of the links between the Internet and the social protests criticized by Echchaibi (2013). The links between Ramón Esono Ebalé and *Radio Macuto* could also be mentioned, but it is most important to highlight the references and the work of those who act clandestinely and anonymously. The *Radio Macuto* reporter '*El Crítico Guineano*' ['The Guinean Critique'] is an example of someone who provides information for the blog¹⁴⁴, in the form of texts, photos and audiovisual records.

It is worth remembering that in a context that lacks freedom, ICTs are technologies of liberation, using networks, mobile phones and the internet as a means to defend freedom (Diamond, 2010).

¹³⁸ Cf Ebalé, 2013d; Omar, 2013.

¹³⁹ Cf Ebalé, 2011c, 2011b.

¹⁴⁰ La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial 2012f, 2012d, 2012j.

¹⁴¹ Cf La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial, 2013d.

¹⁴² Cf Ebalé, 2013b.

¹⁴³ For example, Ramón Esono Ebalé praises Josimar Oyono Eseng (Ebalé, 2012d) and also acknowledges his work as a reporter for *Radio Macuto* (Ebalé, 2013g). A project involving both platforms that was promoted by USA-based EG Justice, (an association directed by the Equatoguinean Tutu Alicante León that aims to promote human rights, transparency and civic participation in Equatorial Guinea) consisted of a video explaining the fortune of Teodoro Nguema Mangué, the elder son of the President Obiang, as well as his troubles with justice system in the USA. The video can be accessed on EG Justice's Youtube channel (EG Justice, 2013), as well as on *Radio Macuto* (La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial, 2013c) and on Juan Tomás Ávila's blog (fronterad revista digital, 2013c).

¹⁴⁴ The reporters are 'ordinary people' (La Radio Macuto, La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial, 2012c), and are honored on *Locos TV*, where their clandestine work is emphasized (Ebalé, 2012c).

Mobile phones are used to document the dictatorship, using images to give a face to everyday practices and to show this to the world. Sokari Ekine (2010), a blogger, in the introduction to the book 'SMS Uprising, Mobile Phone Activism in Africa', claims that the use of mobile phones in Africa is making it possible for activists to embrace the challenges and the changes from within.

In Equatorial Guinea, mobile phones are used to try to raise awareness of the everyday suffering of the people. Because of the discrete nature of the device, mobile phones can be used to record torture¹⁴⁵ and to photograph decaying public health facilities¹⁴⁶, empty social housing or precarious accommodation.¹⁴⁷ Extortions by the police and at military barriers¹⁴⁸ as well as the mistreatment of immigrants¹⁴⁹ can also be recorded. The aim is that the photos become 'photowords', an image that provokes comments on the blogs and a reaction in the country.

From 2011 to 2013, the ties between the three online platforms for the defense of the freedom of speech were strengthened. For example, the radio station *La Voz de los Sin Voz* can be heard through *Radio Macuto*'s webpage as Ramón Esono Ebalé collaborates with them and some interviews made by Moises Nvumba can be read on *Radio Macuto*, like that of Enrique Nsolo.¹⁵⁰ He was one of the leaders of the 15th May 2013 protest that was stopped by the army. Later, he was expelled from the National University of Equatorial Guinea, where he was a teacher.¹⁵¹

The 15th May protest is one example of people wanting to take the streets. The protest at the *Plaza de la Mujer* was organized by Enrique Nsolo, Clara Nsegue Eyí, Fabian Nsué, amongst others. They knew they would have media coverage and advocated for the population to fight for their rights, and to not depend on political parties or electoral polls. They seek international support for the transition to democracy. The act was closed down by the soldiers and some activists were arrested. *Radio Macuto* was 'broadcasting' the events and was cited as a source of information by the Spanish agency Europapress.¹⁵²

It is very difficult for people to take to the streets. Protest is impossible, including by the legalized opposition political party, CPDS, called *bandidos* ['bandits'] by Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangué, also known as Teodorín. Through the exercise of control over the people, the regime aims to neutralize possible contestations. Still, on February 20th, 2013, graffiti appeared in Malabo and in Bata with the sentence '*Obiang vete ya*' ['Obiang go now']. *Radio Macuto* was the first to report on this new graffiti. On this day, Ramón Esono Ebalé embraced the collective:

"Somos la cabeza de turco. Un tal Josimar Oyono Eseng. Un tal Nsé Ramón. Y un tal Moises Nvumba "son ellos". Sí, lo aceptamos. Vengan y acúsenos de que estamos instigando a cosas raras a los que ustedes aseguran de que os quieren mucho" [We are the scapegoat. A certain Josimar Oyono Eseng. A certain Nsé Ramón. A certain Moises Nvumba, «are they». Yes, we accept it. Come and accuse us of instigating weird stuff on those that you ensure you love].¹⁵³

¹⁴⁵ Like the audio recorded on 31st August 2012 in Bata police station and posted in November 2012 (Ebalé, 2012 a).

¹⁴⁶ Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial* 2012h or 2013h.

¹⁴⁷ As in La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012h, 2013f or 2013b.

¹⁴⁸ Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2012k. [The photos of military barriers can be seen](#) La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2013a.

¹⁴⁹ The images of African immigrants treated abusively at La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2013h.

¹⁵⁰ Cf La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2013f.

¹⁵¹ The facts around Enrique Nsolo's detention and expulsion from the university can be consulted at *Locos TV* (Ebalé, 2013a) and *Radio Macuto* (La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial* 2013i) La Radio Macuto, *La Voz de los Sin Voz de Guine Ecuatorial*, 2013j.

¹⁵² On example of this is the liberation of a well-known lawyer and fundamental rights activist, Fabian Nsué, after he was arrested because of his participation in the protest of 15th May 2013. The Spanish news agency refers to *Radio Macuto* as the source of this information (europa press, 2013).

¹⁵³ Cf Ebalé, 2013f.

The idea of embracing the collective can also be explained by the fact that these blogs, among other webpages, were censored in Equatorial Guinea, especially during the election period (from April to June 2013). Although it is a country with low internet access, this shows the fears of the regime over what people see and where they get information. *Radio Macuto* denounced the arbitrary arrests, intimidations and censorship during the aforementioned period, through the reporter Africano Antireg.

The blogs are the visible face of those who are working clandestinely and anonymously, those who work for the voiceless, finding new ways of struggling and of having agency.¹⁵⁴ A new Equatoguinean is being built:

“Es el nuevo guineano que se está creando desde la clandestinidad de la soledad personal. Un nuevo prototipo de persona que antepondrá el interés general al suyo particular. Son muchos, sobre todo jóvenes, que están cambiando la forma de pensar ya que se han dado cuenta de que los límites impuestos por el sistema ya son bastante visibles desde que tienen acceso a otras formas de entender la vida” [This is the new Guinea that is being built clandestinely and from personal solitude. It is a new prototype for a person who will place the general interest above that of the individual. There are many, mostly young people, who are changing the way of thinking, because they have realized that the limits imposed by the system are quite visible as they now have access to other ways of understanding life].¹⁵⁵

One collective character of these three platforms is the ‘Juventud Malentonada’. They do not belong to any political party but are united by the struggle for democracy. They want to fight in new ways for the respect of human rights through civil disobedience, protests and peaceful actions against the dictatorship.¹⁵⁶

They are fighting against the belief that the Equatoguinean people are ‘mentally poor’. The expression ‘*pobres mentales*’ (mental poor) is used in the text of Josimar Oyono Eseng, Ramón Esono Ebalé and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel¹⁵⁷, and the expression has gone viral since its first use by the president Teodoro Obiang to refer to the Equatoguinean people.¹⁵⁸

Obiang largely benefits from the image of the ‘dark continent’ and of the ‘neopatrimonial African State’. Obiang’s dictatorship is justified by the inside – by the president himself – as an African way of doing politics, rallying against what he calls ‘imported ideas’. This is a clear ‘*hecho racial diferencial*’ [‘differential racial fact’], (Ávila Laurel, 2011), used to justify poverty, and a lack of health care, water and electricity. It is a mark of cultural difference that can be used to link it to social and economic subjection, as Ferguson (2007) puts it. In this frame, “a ‘traditional African way of life’ is simply a polite name for poverty” (Ferguson, 2007, p. 21).

In the case of Equatorial Guinea, this is more than a question of cultural difference. It is difference as a concept. The notion of difference also justifies the expression ‘mental poor’ that is so often

¹⁵⁴ Cf Ebalé, 2012b. This contribution argues that agency may be characterized by certain attributes and adjectives in the way people, groups or institutions exemplify their capacity to carry out changes to their social situations (van Dijk, 2007: 315).

¹⁵⁵ Ebalé, 2012b.

¹⁵⁶ Some examples of the ‘new youth’: cf. Ebalé, 2012c. Colectivo de Jovenes de Guinea Ecuatorial, 2013.

¹⁵⁷ The expression ‘mental poor’ is used by Juan Tomás Ávila at Fronterad Revista Digital, 2013a.

¹⁵⁸ Teodoro Obiang Nguema used this expression in an interview with Stephen Sackr in December 2012, on the programme BBC HARDtalk. He said that in Equatorial Guinea there is no poverty, “There is a kind of psychological poverty here which means that even when people are given an opportunity they can remain stuck in the same place” (BBC HARDtalk, 2012: n.p.).

used as a sign of indignation and that reveals a contra-discourse against the mental colonial standards of central power, in this association between culture and inequality.

Those who criticize the works of the regime are called ‘enemies of the homeland’, ‘*envidiosos*’ [‘envious’] or ‘*malentonados*’ (this neologism could mean ‘un-elegant’). But in the context of the struggles fights explained in this chapter, the adjectives that were supposed to offend are taken as compliments by those who are opponents to Obiang’s regime. As Ramón Esono Ebalé explained when he created the blog, the world is made by the *locos*, from Obiang to the international community and the people of Equatorial Guinea who do not stand up to the dictatorship. And among the *locos* are the *cuerdos*, ‘the rationales’, those who will fight. The exiled dissident Samuel Mba Mombe presents himself as ‘*indignado, malentonado, loco, enemigo de la patria*’ [‘outraged, un-elegant, mad, enemy of the homeland’].

The internet allows for a greater presence of Equatoguinean voices in the blogosphere and the use of virtual social networks for debate. This enables them to spread the manifestation of their interests and opinions to a wider audience, despite the low level of Internet access in the country. The concept of possibility is key when dealing with this subject. *Radio Macuto* and *The Voice of the Voiceless* (the same name as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation’s radio station) offer new possibilities for spreading information and strengthening the sense of the end of historical abandonment that the people of the country have experienced since independence. The international character of a fight against the dictatorship needs to be taken into account when analyzing these aims of a collective struggle.

From being collected and controlled by a dictatorial regime, they try to instill a sense of collectiveness. Considering political and social participation, the Internet is used to campaign for information and for the right to criticize, considering alternative readings and proposals for the reality of the country. They aim for democracy, and for them, democracy begins with the delegitimization of the dictatorship ‘*sin fisuras*’ [‘without splits’]. The first step towards democracy is the freedom of speech. A new political regime means the proper use by the population of oil revenues, an end to ethnic divides as promoted by the dictatorship, an end to the possibility of Obiang being succeeded by one of his sons, as well as freedom of speech, an end to the repression of those who peacefully oppose the regime and an open public debate on social memory and the recent history of the country.

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