
Cultures of Dialogue and Pro-democracy in Equatorial Guinea and Diaspora

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Abstract: In March 2022, pro-democratic actors, civil society platforms and organisations, and political activists from Equatorial Guinea and its diaspora signed the *Pacto Político* and *Pacto de Concordia*, an agreement to build a *culture of dialogue* and deepen its mechanisms toward peaceful political transitions and governance collaboration. This paper presents perspectives on a *culture of dialogue* within the contexts of national and diasporic socio-political movements, transnationalism, and webs of digital connections committed to defending human rights, civil liberties, and political freedom and representation in Equatorial Guinea. The inquiry of a *culture of dialogue* as an agreement to respect political plurality and cooperate in cohesion in response to lived experiences of struggle for liberation focuses on the trajectories of a civic society platform or social alliances. This inquiry considers phenomenology as a point of departure to analyse how the centrality of bodies' expressions, performances, and lived experiences represent cultural references for the meaning and practice of dialogue. This preliminary and general overview of one description of the culture of dialogue among pro-democratic actors in Equatorial Guinea and diaspora identifies characteristics and qualities of dialogue based on the trajectories and combinations of identities, spaces, and social structures. Pro-democratic actors' transnational, diasporic, and digital political mobilisation enrich theoretical conversations about *intra-* and *inter-community dialogues*, *calls for dialogue*, and *public dialogues*. The goal is to expand into possibilities and venues of peaceful pressure systems that, despite the challenges in communication and non-existent peaceful relations between dictatorship and pro-democratic systems in Equatorial Guinea, attempt to solve immediate needs and build up a culture of understanding and collaboration.

Keywords: Dialogue, culture, Equatorial Guinea, Diaspora, Human Rights

Introduction

On March 28 and 29, 2022, human rights defenders, activists, civil society platforms and organisations, and representatives of political parties from Equatorial Guinea

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and diasporas gathered in person and virtually in Madrid, Spain, to review aspects of the socio-political history in the country and exchange proposals for non-violent political transitions toward democracy in contexts of dictatorial governance that suppresses political plurality and political participation (Espacios Europeos 2022). Based on the understanding that democratic government (Hountondji 2002) refers to 'a principle of governance for developing a comprehensive and consistent procedure and orientation for effective and humanistic administration of the state' (Ntui 2021, 77), pro-democratic actors, women, and men living in Equatorial Guinea and abroad, co-signed in agreement the documents called *Pacto Político* (Political Pact) and *Pacto de Concordia* (Concord Pact).

The *Pacto Político* is an agreement on political and civic society intervention to support civil liberties and peaceful democratic transitions in contexts of exploitation, corruption, and a monoculture of accumulation (Wood 2004). The second dictatorship, led by the Head of State Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo since 1979, does not benefit the country. The political system's violence and repression negatively impact the progress of education, healthcare, and civic freedom and representation. The *Pacto* recognises that a dictatorial political system disrespects the Rule of Law (Comisión Ecuatoguineana de Juristas) and therefore calls for processes of an inclusive dialogue that defends amnesty, freedom to political prisoners, democratic elections, legalisation of all political parties and social organisations, and the participation of the civil society, or 'all forms of organised voluntary association and social interaction not controlled by the government, self-generating, largely self-supporting, and operating within the constitutional and legal frameworks of the state and observing a set of shared values' (Marume et al. 2016, 68; Radio Macuto 2022).

The *Pacto de Concordia* is an agreement on a code of conduct, a non-aggression pact, and the proposal of a system and guidance for cooperation and coordination between the signees to support and adopt social change and peaceful action toward political advocacy plans. Pro-democratic actors signed the *Pacto de Concordia* as a peace agreement to build a culture of dialogue among themselves as organisations, individuals, and allies. The culture of dialogue integrates a written agreement of peaceful communication, acceptance of differences, and a conflict resolution protocol to maintain peaceful cooperation. The proposal for a culture of dialogue symbolises a framework for abidance to denounce political oppression, violence, democratic façades, corruption, and fraudulent elections (Campos 2013; Africa UCM-CIDAF 2014; Rupiya 2020).

This paper discusses preliminary ideas on the concept of *a culture of dialogue* among pro-democratic actors in Equatorial Guinea and its diaspora from the moment of the signing in 2022 through the beginning of 2023. Focusing on the actions and

performances of a civil society platform, a solidarity alliance ‘among different sectors [that] helps create a sense of belongingness with others and loyalty in interests’ (Płachciak 2009, 86), their *culture of dialogue* became an object of study. As a daughter of the African diaspora, the daughter of an Equatoguinean man who migrated to Spain, and a supportive member of the platform living in the United States, I developed interest in learning more about the meanings, practices, and implications of the concept of culture of dialogue immersed in socio-political and diasporic movements. Other studies consider *cultures of dialogue* as functional tools that *develop relationships* among social and political groups that disagree, as in the case of indigenous communities’ efforts to protect land rights in the face of oil companies’ exploitation plans in Russia (Stammler et al. 2008). The notion of culture of dialogue is also considered as a medium to *nurture relationships* between religious communities and the state in the Republic of North Macedonia to integrate collaboration in governance (Gjorgjevski 2020), or a *medium for peacebuilding*, as in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the period after the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993 and before the outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian violence in September 2000 (Mollov and Lavie 2001).

Through the use of phenomenological perspectives that focus on actors and agents as manoeuvres of culture and forms of life, this discussion integrates the consideration patterns, repeated behaviours (Boulding et al. 2019), webs of significance, and ways of living (Bell et al. 1998), and multilayered social realms for the management of dialogue not only between groups and communities but also *within* communities, organisations, and platforms that share common goals and ideals. The purpose is to understand how the concept of culture of dialogue among pro-democratic actors in Equatorial Guinea and diasporas increases the capacity for collaboration to address common problems.

Perspectives on Cultures of Dialogue

Culture is a notoriously difficult term to define. Culture affects behaviour and interpretations of behaviour, manifests at multilayered social levels, and can be differentiated from universal human nature and unique individual personalities (Spencer-Oatey 2012). Dialogue is an explorative subject (Jacobi et al. 2021). Personal experiences and systems of thoughts and symbols can inform what culture and dialogue might signify (Schein 2003). Dialogue becomes a cultural element when perceived as a learned and repeated behaviour gravitating toward exchanges of expressions related to social needs and spark issue-oriented mechanisms (Pickering and Garrod 2021).

The literature describes *cultures of dialogue* as elements operating within the realms of social difference and disagreement (Chukwuokolo and Jeko 2019) and within and between communities and organisations or micro-social life modes of connections and formations (Jacobi et al. 2021). For example, The World Café is an international organisation committed to building up a culture of dialogue by bringing people worldwide together to discuss issues of everyday life and solution-seeking matters to improve life (Tan and Brown 2005). Another example is the London-based Colombian peacebuilding organisation called *Rodeemos el Diálogo* (Embrace Dialogue, ReD) currently working toward giving dialogue a cultural status through the practice of consistent communication, habits, and techniques that produce optimal organisational work to ultimately support peacebuilding in Colombia in collaboration with other organisations and communities (Mesa Velez 2019, 93).

Cultures of dialogue are embedded in social dynamics that treasure symbols, sets of rules, learning guidelines, and recipes for action and opportunity (Okeja 2010). The concept in question navigates across social structures, human relations, and ever-changing and multi-levelled social conditions and roles (Bell et al. 1998). Cultural dialogues as analytical concepts create and recreate dynamic and subjective models of social interaction with unique characteristics and spatial localities. So, in this manner, and as a way to contextualise this preliminary inquiry, there exists a universe of interpretations of cultural understandings of dialogue. Although there also exists the need to include specific characteristics and structures of the functionalities of dialogue, it is possible to start with the idea that dialogue targets specific social problems and solutions, as in the case of the *community's dialogues* in Cyprus, Estonia, China, Sweden, and Cuba that specifically target neighbourhoods and localities and their immediate social crises (Marková and Gillespie 2011), revealing thus the model perspective based on shared semantics, relationships, and inter-subjectivities (Coulthard and Rock 2017).

The culture of dialogue among pro-democratic actors and diasporas is embedded within social structures and symbols that generate it through the juxtaposition of entire life forms and philosophical underpinnings of concretely situated embodied beings (Baerveldt 2014). The highlight in this inquiry points to phenomenological perspectives: glances toward the body and its performances, or the body-self interchanging social roles, transformations, and engagements within social and political spheres as both body-social and body-political (Mensch 2009). This inquiry focuses on the actors themselves, actors or bodies in action, or agents representing 'living vessels of culture' (Lock 1993, 140). In this manner, meanings first emerge from individuals and their learned cultural experiences to capture *dialogue*, or *dialogism*, 'dialogic learning, thus implying intersubjectivity [...] diverse people exchanging

ideas, acquiring and producing knowledge, and creating new meanings that transform both the language and the content of their lives' (Aubert and Soler 2006, 522).

Within transnationalism, diasporic worlds, and digital communication, the understanding is that the constructivism process of cultures of dialogue transcends, interacts, and connects with the larger community and the global (Zezeza 2009), as in the case of the African Diaspora Dialogue Project. This civic society organisation facilitates in-group and outward dialogic processes to address social challenges and mobilise toward conflict resolution within socio-political contexts in the United States, Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo, and Liberia (Tint and Sarkis 2014). It is interesting to note that, as the inquiry deepens, dialogue acquires instrumental and qualifying characteristics. This paper reveals that, within the trends of transnational social movements for collaborative governance and public policy development (Nicholas and Dyer 2003), the practice of dialogue allows the learning of human relations, values such as inclusiveness, survival, wellness, fairness, and compromise (Bohm et al. 1991). Diversity in dialogue delineates profiles of local, communal, global, and transnational relations (Kate and Lane 2021), defines and qualifies interactions as 'equal status,' 'cooperative,' and 'competitive' (Mollov and Lavie 2001), and sustains 'public movements,' 'collective agencies,' 'partnerships' as tools to incite awareness and advocacy of cultural and developmental differences, commitment, and possibilities (Stammler and Pesk 2008).

From Within: Cultural and Political Dialogues

Following the philosophy of phenomenology (Jackson et al. 2015), or the study or science of phenomena, or the *how* rather than the *what* of an object of interest, the highlight is the centrality of human experience and *being in the world* (Zahavi 2018). My interest in the phenomenological glasses started in reviewing some of the principles of humanism that state that everything perceptible in our world has been managed, created, and transformed through biological formulations, including humans. Phenomenology looks into the frameworks of personal lives and trajectories that guide the sense of self, personhood, and identity and how these philosophical and introspective human qualities reflect on performances and social relations (Janz 1996).

As I started my journey as the daughter of the African diaspora living transnationally, I became interested in Equatorial Guinea, my father's country. After years of exploration and learning about the migratory experiences and social transitioning of many Equatoguineans that followed the declaration of independence from colonial Spain on October 12, 1968, the overrun of President-elect Francisco Macias Nguema, the violation of the Constitutional Law of the same year, the coup d'état in

1969 that established eleven years of the first long military regime, and the second dictatorship still in power since 1979 (Fleischhacker 1999), I found individuals and communities in Equatorial Guinea and abroad that advocated for freedom and the defence of human rights through socio-political movements.

From the diaspora, between sporadic visits to Equatorial Guinea to visit my family and through the mediums of digital worlds, I joined a civic society platform or organisation to contribute to their efforts in building up and maintaining a culture of dialogue dedicated to constructing social fabrics of peaceful democratic transitions collaboratively. Furthermore, I learned that pro-democratic actors, women, and men of all ages, represent the diverse ethnic groups in Equatorial Guinea, such as Bubi, Fernandino, Annobones, Ndowne, and Fang, and express a sense of rootedness. I engaged in conversation, meetings, and gatherings, collaborated on what was needed, and listened to stories of remembrance and life in Equatorial Guinea and original understandings of culture and dialogue. Following the phenomenological transits that look into learned experiences with communication, language, and perceptions of gender roles and power relations (Bawa 2012), I noticed the special highlight of remembrances and returns to *home*, to the place of birth, familial spaces, and community ties. For those who have stayed, remaining in Equatorial Guinea represents a source of pride, as they are thriving and resisting despite restrictions in political participation. For those who have migrated, the memory of past experiences coexists with ideas on who they were while they lived in Equatorial Guinea, and their understandings of the self, home, and social life.

Cultural contributions intersect with present understandings and practices of dialogue. As described in the Africa Dialogue Series (2021), revisiting culture and familial roots incites adopting a forward-looking mindset and is a strength and essential ingredient that nurtures transformations (African Renewal 2021). In its cultural contexts, dialogue contains values that serve as conduits for relations, alliances, lineages, traditional laws, and conflict restoration. The experience of dialogue, expressed locally and cosmologically, reflects teachings of cultural histories bridged with the present and modernity (Nzimakwe 2014; Bawa 2012). In Equatorial Guinea, ideas of *cultural dialogues* recall past immersions in localities across and between socio-economic, ethnic, gender, rural, and urban spaces and contexts. The recall of dialogue *at home*, such as ‘We don’t have it (political dialogue); we are not used to it; the cultural yes, but the political not so much,’ brings into the scene further characteristics of dialogue, such distinctions between forms of dialogue, as if dialogue within the realms of the home resulted from a different nature compared to the formats of dialogues encountered outside of the familiar. *Home associations* (identities, sense of belonging, political inequities) contribute to the moulding of

transnational African diasporic organisations and political mobilisation (Mercer and Evans 2008).

Individual trajectories or bodies-in-motion merge with constructions and manifestations of being and the embodiment of personal, cultural, and political identities. Professionals, mothers, daughters, fathers, and sons as well as sisters and brothers became aware of the significance of social roles and civic status. As individuals, they remain aware they belong to the socio-political history of Equatorial Guinea (Chambers and Kopstein 2001). In this manner, waves and movements toward independence and liberation in Equatorial Guinea fuelled pro-democratic processes within the context of a history of colonialism and anti-colonial sentiments (Fernández 2015; Okenve 2018), as well as the rise and formation of democratic values, such as the defence of freedom of expression, political manifestation, pluralism in political parties, constitutional legitimacy, and transparent free, fair, periodic, and all-inclusive elections (Aworawo 2012; Sundiata 2019). The negative impacts of the dictatorial system on the population and political opportunity prevail. Some challenges posed by the present unjust system include the systematic repression of civic and pro-democratic movements, corruption, and political violence, as well as forms of stagnation in the expectations of democratisation and respect for human rights (Angüe 2011).

‘National Dialogues’ and Pro-democratic Movements

In Equatorial Guinea, the need for representation led civilians, politicians, and government officials to the signing of the Constitutional Conference and the Act of Independence by the state of Spain, a consequence of the only democratic elections in the country that took place on August 21, 1968, along with constituted political parties, and the following Independence Day on October 12, 1968 (Castro and Ndongo-Bidyogo 1998). Along with African liberal and independentist movements that supported democracy as a principle of governance (Ntui 2021), the drive toward democratic movements in Equatorial Guinea motivated the step forward to legalise political parties in the 1990s (Lashmar 1992). On February 10 and March 16, 1993, the government and representatives of legalised political parties met in Malabo’s capital to create political pluralism premises that ensured freedom in the country and abroad. In a context of hope for democratisation, the *Pacto Nacional* of 1993 (Comision Europea 1993) established political freedoms and pluralistic elections, agreements officially signed on March 18, thus, unfolding the first National Dialogue Table – o *Mesa de Diálogos Nacionales*. The National Dialogues, between the government, public institutions, legalised political parties, and political leaders sat at the table to discuss law, constitutional rights, and political freedom. However, the *Pacto Nacional* (National Pact) was unsuccessful. The political realms of the

country remained divided into ‘two dialogues’ or diverging narratives, partly due to divisions, unproductive attempts to reach agreements, and the government’s incapacity to fulfil its responsibilities (Nsé and Micó 2016).

Like other national dialogues worldwide that never reached an agreement or were partially implemented due to fragmented social and political structures (Paffenholz and Helfer 2017; Wählisch 2017), the national dialogues in Equatorial Guinea that followed in the consecutive years of 1997, 2001, and 2014 through the Manifesto de Madrid (Africa UCM-CIDAF 2022), also resulted in unfulfilled practice. The national dialogues attempted to reform and apply constitutional laws; however, the exponential social and political fragmentation brought deception and broken promises (Esono Ondo 2014; Nsé and Micó 2016). The last National Dialogue took place in 2018. The Head of State recalled the importance of political agreements for the nation’s peaceful development. The State proposed the creation of *a culture of peace* and reconciliation, words that became stamped in the signing of the Binding National Pact. However, the negotiations of equal rights and obligations were, yet again, unfulfilled (Revista Real EG 2022).

The political violence of the dictatorship system continues to influence pro-democratic actors to call for and propose a culture of dialogue. Despite numerous pacts signed, such as the Democratic Coalition in the Palacio del Pueblo of Malabo in 2017, the General Democratic Pact for National Reconciliation and the Governance and Political Stability of Equatorial Guinea in 1998, The Coexistence Pact between the State and the People, The Coexistence Pact for Secularism, The Pact for a Democratic and Republican National Unity, and The Historical Memory Pact (CORED Pacto de Convivencia Nacional), dictatorships are not known to provide a friendly environment for open dialogue to conjointly and collaboratively resolve differences about power distribution (Kojevnikov 1999, 227). Instead, dictatorships are characterised by instilling *cultures of terror*, entangled contradictions in the particularities of constitutionalism, reform, and legal interpretations that inherently accept repressive law and oppressive political procedures (Osiel 1995; Crouch 2018; Elinoff 2019), and are consequently detrimental to the development of education, health-care systems, and life (Geloso et al. 2020).

Despite the challenges of stagnation in the expectations of democratisation and respect for human rights, pro-democratic actors in Equatorial Guinea and diasporas create opportunities to expand social networks and come together in alliance (Bernal 2020). Through digital political worlds (South African Institute of International Affairs 2019), pro-democratic actors mobilise and organise, respect each other, and other groups, share meaningful connections that strengthen social roles, sustain open lines of communication, friendship, trust, knowledge, and define and

build mechanisms, for example, of a culture of dialogue agreed upon a Pact, to motivate collaborative work and political participation. Among an array or plethora of legalised, exiled, and clandestine social and political movements (Baynham 1986; Staffan 2006; Sá 2021), pro-democratic actors support women and feminist movements (Allan 2019), writers, activists, and artists *artistas* (Ugarte 2010), and other members of the civil society (Bernal 2020), and platforms or 'organised groups and associations that enjoy autonomy in their relationship with the State and that are voluntarily formed by members of society to protect and disseminate their interests' (Maroto 2014, 176).

Intra-community Dialogues: Collaborative and Organisational Performances

The methodological dynamics of the *intra-community dialogue* or the *inside dialogue* (Jacobi et al. 2021) provide the structural framework of the platform. The platform was first realised in 2021 envisioning collaborative and organisational work while considering that the conditions for community dialogue (Zoller 2000) include balancing consensus with the present realities of social tensions in organising and activism. Throughout 2022 and early 2023, I noticed that collaborative and organisational performances needed to be sustained by regular and consistent communication through meetings online or in person. Engagement and presence represent vital elements essential to move forward. However, we also understand that we can contribute to the cause according to our unique circumstances. Everyone is welcome.

The platform coordination and members often clarify expectations and dialogue rules focused on organisational work and building conceptual models for activism and practice. Highlighting the goal of concrete plans to organise orientation, ground rules, and approaches to action, reminders of the importance of regular revisions of the *Pacto de Concordia* and *Pacto Político* balance the challenges related to disagreement and confusion over procedures, responsibilities, trajectories, and division of responsibilities. Based on established regulations for dialogue, the platform evokes peaceful communication and the need to understand others and oneself instead of imposing one's beliefs as synonyms of the absolute truth. The culture of dialogue among pro-democratic actors belonging to the platform represents a way of learning together, recognising the different life experiences that underpin the different views and the legitimacy of the other, that is, their humanity, despite disagreements on values and ideas.

The internal organisational work aims to commit to peaceful dialogue during group discussions, consensual and compartmentalised action toward the planning and definition of functional structures, evaluation procedures, leadership and coopera-

tion, resource searching, networking, communication, and information exchanges. In addition, the internal organisational work of this civic platform aims to improve skills and political capacitation or citizen empowerment to form a culture of political participation, co-responsible and critical, with the capacity to transform social realities. Political capacitation, or citizenship-building processes and the strengthening of the social fabric through citizen organisation towards a culture of civic participation engages initiatives that expand political education on the role of members of civil society in politics. Through regular communication and exchanges of didactic information, the goal is to understand how the political embodiment of each participating individual turns implicit in the day-to-day practice of activism, thus defining the understanding of civic rights and responsibilities in contexts of dictatorial regimes and political systems (Igambo 2006; Allan 2019).

Intra-community dialogues invest in political mobilisation through frequent communication over the importance of knowing, being informed, and being aware of the social and political happenings in Equatorial Guinea. The internal dialogue among all members of the organisation reflects an interest in the news, especially about governance and juridical systems, to develop formal and informal conversation and exchange ideas on how to act and respond. One vivid example of internal movements within the organisation that exponentially reflected outward was the flow of communication about the irregularities of the 2022 legislative, municipal, and senatorial elections in Equatorial Guinea. The holding of presidential elections on November 20 violated the current legal system in the country because, according to the Constitutional and Electoral law, the presidential elections should occur legally every seven years or early 2023 (República de Guinea Ecuatorial, Boletín del Estado 2012; Europa Press 2022).

The internal work included following the election's development and the consecutive sharing of narratives about the corrupting nature of present and past elections organised by the dictatorial regime since 1973. Among pro-democratic actors, the 2022 fraudulent elections served as a reminder of the past and the lack of opportunity among civilians in Equatorial Guinea to learn about civic rights, laws, and possibilities in political participation. *Analfabetismo político*, or political illiteracy, prevails due to distorted messages the regime delivers to the public, such as the belief that pro-democratic activism is violent. Equatorial Guinea is a 'captured country' divided into four social groups: the dictator and his family, the dictatorship's collaborators, spies, informants, and the masses. The organisational work focused on the strategies that enable civic actors in civic spaces to publicly communicate the non-recognition of the 2022 national elections while recommending to the general population in the country not to vote or even engage in the parody of the campaigns, as these violated the principles established in the Constitution of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea,

the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Convention on Human Rights (GE Nuestra 2022).

Pro-democratic actors in Equatorial Guinea and the diaspora organised internally to find mediums to denounce the 2022 illegal and non-democratic 'elections' and the absence of fundamental freedoms under a sixth-term presidency that has overtaken an entire oil-rich country and where the vast majority of its 1.3 million inhabitants live below the poverty line (France 24 2022). On official communication platforms and social media, the organisation publicly denounced the political violence that arose during the electoral year. There was a proliferation of detentions and arrests of opponents, audits, activists, and anyone who disagreed with the ruling political party. The platform attempted to support those individuals and their families in need while the government criminalised rival parties by storming their headquarters and homes, initiating waves of violent '*limpieza*' (cleaning), arresting, torturing, and withdrawing legal rights of defence and representation (Amnesty International 2022).

Amid the processes of internal dialogue and *calls for dialogue* or exchanges that mobilise and help 'community groups define and achieve their preferred future' (Finegold et al. 2002, 235), the challenges that surfaced in the culture of dialogue among pro-democratic actors in diasporic worlds and Equatorial Guinea, were missing meetings, different personalities, questions of power relations, vulnerabilities of stagnation, frustration, and uncollaborative attitudes. Through experience, peaceful conflict resolution, constant work, empowerment, revision of the pacts and the plans to stabilise the consensus apparatuses, collective leadership, and objective communication, the internal practice of dialogue reflected a commitment to call for processes of inner peace while poking the government and delivering calls for compliance with the standards of a Rule of Law and international agreements as a State member of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) (GE Nuestra 2022).

Inter-community Dialogues: Calls for Dialogue and Transnational Socio-political Movements

In the contexts of international and socio-political movements, African diasporic politics, and collective identity formations (Adamson 2012; Bingaman and Charnovitz 2001), pro-democratic actors communicate internally, exchange ideas and proposals, work toward consensus and collaboration to produce an impact on the efforts to participate in peaceful transitions to democracy in Equatorial Guinea. Intra-community dialogues belong to a more significant movement that values dialogue as a medium to understand needs and reach unbreakable agreements. The civic

society platform or open organisation becomes part of local and global strategies that define and turn into reality collaborative governance in Equatorial Guinea. In this way, processes of social expansion enlarge this culture of dialogue into communal discussions that request immediate proposals and actions for resolution.

Envisioning stages for developing engagements before and during the first two years of its life since 2021, this platform perceives social enlargement and networking as necessary alliances for progress. From local political opportunities, inceptions of social organising, and national and transnational networks, to diffusion to the international spheres across host states in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, this civic society platform creates its supranational and global circles of support. Networks of transnational activism and transnational justice (Koinova 2017) manifest inter-community dialogues (Jacobi et al. 2021), or the sharing of political identities and expectations, and the understanding that relatively small-scale examples of dialogue can develop an awareness to increase participation in defence of human rights and peaceful transitions to freedom and democratic governance.

There exist diverse levels of inter-community dialogues that operate internationally, such as the National Summit on Africa to bring forward the dialogue on Africa-US relations, or the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State-building (IDPS), a forum for political dialogue that brings together countries affected by conflict and fragility. Pro-democratic actors actively demonstrate inside and outside Equatorial Guinea in alliance with political parties, groups, and international human rights organisations. Aided by social media platforms, journalists, and public and private institutions, the joining of voices and performances takes place through the systematic public exposure of the oppression in Equatorial Guinea and the curtailed efforts of the civil society in the country to demonstrate and contribute to social change. The whole civic mobilisation strengthens efforts for *calls for dialogue*. Throughout 2022 and early 2023, the message called for a dialogue cultivated to defend justice and the human right to protest politically.

Calls for dialogue, or ‘rational dialogue in procedural rhetoric of access, one that defines participants as equal partners in a definitional venture by which a form of truth is sought’ (Anderson et al. 2003, 8), requested the government of Equatorial Guinea to assume responsibility in the caring and support of the victims and families affected by the explosions at a military station in the neighbourhood of Nkoantoma in the city of Bata on March 7, 2021 (DW 2021). In 2021 and 2022, individuals and organisations publicly denounced the inability of the government to supply emergency aid, implement an investigation to address unresolved questions about the causes of the tragic event, and the non-canalised funds and resources delivered to support the victims and their families (Aljazeera 2021). Like many other diasporic

initiatives, individuals and organisations communicated with nationals and institutions in Bata and Malabo and established an aid system that included financial help. Calls for dialogue integrated press releases denouncing and demanding explanations of unresolved questions, requests, and proposals to organise and foment debates or transnational dialogues at public and community tables, as well as radio and social media interviews that discussed the government's negligence in care toward the population while proposing strategies to improve the situation; there was consistent political activism and readiness to defend human lives in the context of a violent dictatorial regime.

The 2021 and 2022 commemorations of the Independence Day of October 12, 1968, represented opportunities to deliver clear messages: absolute independence will not be achieved in Equatorial Guinea without freedom of expression. Pro-democratic actors from diverse associations and political parties voiced the need to value freedom and peace. The youth and the artist community organised a musical concert in Malabo, *Concierto por la Paz*, on October 11. However, the regime's security forces dismantled the gathering on the same day (Radio Macuto 2022). While the Head of State and affiliates celebrated Independence Day with military parades, activists in the diaspora, including civic society organisations, came together in 2022, as they do year after year, to share public spaces in Spain at the Equatorial Guinea embassy in Madrid, community halls, and other cities and countries and publicly speak up, demand to be heard, and denounce the dictatorial regime's negative impact upon life. Debates, workshops, and political meetings invited dialogue and discussion, projecting at the same time videos and audio recordings on social media that consistently portrayed the political corruption brewing in their homeland.

Inter-community dialogue flourishes even with its challenges. This level of dialogue inquiry that reveals interchanges and calls for dialogue, including embodiments of belief and arguments on social suffering under dictatorships, projects a strong vision of global pro-democracy (Rosenblat 2022). While pro-democratic actors express their need to be heard by the government of Equatorial Guinea, differences and conflict arise as critical comments and narratives on what this other organisation is doing or what the other is not doing. Yet, leadership and commitment always intervene to develop opportunities so that the theory of peaceful dialogue can continuously serve as a guide during trying times. Throughout 2021 and 2022, communities, groups, and political associations in Equatorial Guinea and the diaspora engaged in digital media and digital connectivity (Bernal 2020) to interchange communications among themselves and produce diverse calls for dialogues, such as press releases and political announcements calling for an end to political violence. The series of elections since 1973, including that organised on November 20, 2022, have resulted in

the illegitimate continuation of the presidency (Europapress 2022). Different organisations drafted public letters; some were signed in collaboration and published online. Messages included the non-recognition of the government-imposed fraudulent assault on the homeland elections. Transnational social actors demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners and other activists arbitrarily detained for months without fair trials (Africa UCM-CIDAF 2023).

Conclusion: Public Dialogues and Implications

Given the efforts to call for dialogue, what are the results? What is the response of the government in Equatorial Guinea? What are the implications of the culture of dialogue among pro-democratic actors in Equatorial Guinea and its diaspora? This preliminary and general exploration reveals the explorative nature of dialogue and culture combined through phenomenological perspectives: the investigation of human experience and the impacts of bodies on cultural remodelling (Jackson et al. 2015). The constructions and maintenance of a culture of dialogue imply developments of the self, personhood, sense of identity, and political embodiments. Dialogue, as a human practice, and adopted by pro-democratic actors to foment respect and understanding as a way to interact with repression and political violence, unfolds within personal lives, trajectories, and social structures to expand and transform to ultimately highlight *calls for dialogue* and *public dialogues* as implications of the determination to achieve engagement and peaceful transformations.

The impact of the civil society platform reflects the power of dialogue for peacekeeping and the building of civil society and community organisations. The internal engineering of consistent communication and planning reflects designs to produce calls for dialogue that become known worldwide. The calls for change in unequal systems of distribution of political capacity and collaboration in Equatorial Guinea reiterate collaborative constructionist thinking toward agreement on models of activism, or ‘a methodology that begins a dialogue between individuals, expands to groups and builds to embrace and declare community-wide intentions and actions (...)’ (Finegold et al. 2002, 235). However, the challenges continue. In February 2023, pro-democratic actors agreed on the fact that Equatorial Guinea has committed internationally to protecting human rights and felt able to denounce corruption and kleptocracy on the day that the Invest in African Energy forum was held in London (UK) on January 26 and planned to receive the Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons as guest (Oil Review 2023). Once again, the internal communication of the civic society platform produced several press releases and joined public demonstrations, showing, thus, that the work of maintaining a culture of dialogue is a constant enterprise.

On February 16, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Movement for the Liberation of Equatorial Guinea Third Republic political party announced the death of a Guinean political prisoner kidnapped in South Sudan in 2019 along with three other opponents and taken to Equatorial Guinea by force, where repeated torture was reported before his life sentence on charges of attempted coup d'état and terrorism (Euronews 2023). Pro-democratic actors organised, requested explanations, and denounced the system, including senior officials' torture. Activists called for declarations and a resolution that included the 'release of political prisoners, call on the Equatorial Guinean authorities to respect international human rights law, humane detention conditions, fair trials and access to families and lawyers for detainees' (CDE 2023). Due to the tenacity and constant enterprise to keep political activism active and productive by civic organisations, political exiles, groups, and international organisations, the European Parliament joined calls for justice and dialogue between February 15 and 17 and presented a 'Joint Motion and Resolution on violence against opposition activists in Equatorial Guinea, notably the case of Julio Obama Mefuman' (European Parliament 2023). The government reacted with a non-dialogic response denying human rights violations (Radio Macuto 2023).

The political mobilisation among pro-democratic actors contributes to innovative digital and national democracy (Gopaldas 2019) and a universe of expressions exclusively dedicated to public dialogues or peaceful pressure systems that, despite the challenges in communication and a non-existent exchange between dictatorship and pro-democratic systems (Haggard and Kaufman 2016), thrive on solving immediate needs and building up a culture of collaboration.

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