Call for Chapters:

Televisual Dissidence in an Era of Information Warfare: Separatism, Terrorism and the Screen Media in Africa

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Concept Notes

Since the 1960s, Africa has been home to many separatist insurgencies and terrorist movements. These violent movements have particularly been perceptible in such sub-regions of the continent as Cabinda (in Angola), Katanga (in the Democratic Republic of Congo), Casamence (in Senegal), south-eastern and northern Nigeria, Anglophone Cameroon, Tigray, Ogaden and Oromia (in Ethiopia), Somaliland (Somalia), Caprivi (Namibia) and Juan (Comoros), among others. Although exceedingly low compared to other regions of the world, Africa's separatist insurgents and terrorist groups continue to represent a serious destabilising force as well as a threat to the cooperate existence of many countries in the African continent. The movements have so far been successful in Southern Sudan and Eritrea. Such a success has caused governments in countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola, Senegal, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo among others, to constantly be on the watch and to develop newer and ever flexible strategies to protect the integrity of their respective territories. According to scholars such as Tull (2011) and Fomies (2022), most separatist insurgents cannot muster enough military power to force the central state to agree to separation. Yet, almost all the African governments that domestically face secessionist insurgencies and terrorist tendencies continuously resent the explosion and triumph of separatism and terrorism in their territories. These African governments have therefore fiercely been combating the insurgents in their countries, using even unorthodox weapons such as human right violations, authoritarianism and fake news among others (Boas & Dunn, 2017). These governments' anti-extremism war has taken place on all possible fronts, from military and diplomatic terrains to the cyberspace.

One such war front is the media sphere, particularly the audio-visual ecology. In effect, the battle against separatism and other forms of extremism has these last years, quickly shifted to the audio-visual media landscape for obvious reasons: the insurgents and terrorist organisations have of recent, resorted to the setting and running of clandestine radio and television stations whose ultimate goals have been to signify gross defiance against state authority, boost separatist/insurgents' propaganda and public diplomacy efforts and hopefully win the hearts of both local and international audiences. In Cameroon for instance, the Ambazonia separatist

movements clandestinely set a fleet of broadcasters including the *Ambazonia Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC) (also known as "Amba TV"), the *Ambazonia Freedom TV* and the *Ambazonia Communication Networks* among others. The principal roles of these media outlets have partly been to defy the Cameroonian government and draw awareness to the cause of Ambazonia militias operating in Cameroon (Orock 2021). In Nigeria, Igbo separatist movements have similarly launched the *Biafra TV* and *Radio Biafra;* while the Boko Haram insurgents have seasonally run various radio stations in the northern part of the country. Ethiopian replicas of these pro-separatist broadcasters include *Tigray Regional TV,* the *Oromia Broadcasting Network* (OBN) and *Dimtse Woyane* (DW) which, for years, have been bent on spreading the propaganda of some Tigrayan secessionist movements (Skjerdal & Moges 2021).

Alternatively or simultaneously, some separatist insurgent groups have sought to depend on foreign television stations to get their propaganda messages across to local audiences. On August 11, 2009 for instance, a private Kenya Broadcaster *Nation Television* (aka *NTV*) aired a four-part investigative report about the activities of the Oromo Liberation Front, an Ethiopian separatist group. This broadcast provoked a diplomatic dilemma between Kenya and Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government accused Kenya-based *Nation TV* of supporting separatism on its soil by providing a forum to an unlawful organisation.

Similarly, a good number of western television stations have come under fire for subtly – and apparently unwillingly – relaying some controversial messages from separatist movements. In their coverage of terrorism or separatism in Africa, these western television stations have sometimes advertently or inadvertently broadcast controversial information which African governments have regarded as, or suspected to be insidious support for extremism in their territories. For instance, in one of its January 2024 evening news, French broadcaster *France 2* aired a report where it contrasted the firepower of terrorist and separatist groups operating in Mali with that of the Malian military. In a muscular retaliatory action, the Malian communication authorities accused *France 2* of "glorifying terrorism". On the basis of this perceived blunder, the French broadcaster was suspended for four months, and removed from broadcasting packages in Mali. Similarly, another French broadcaster, *TV5 Monde*, displayed the Ambazonia flag alongside the Cameroonian flag in a January 25, 2024 broadcast that aimed at listing African countries qualified to the next round of the 2024 African Cup of Nations. The broadcast generated a huge controversy and a diplomatic incident between Cameroon and France.

In addition to the techniques and situations mentioned above, some separatist and terrorist groups have gone to the extent of disrupting the television-based campaigns launched against them by the central state. A case in point is Al-Shabaab, an insurgent/terrorist movement which is very active in the Horn of Africa. In 2013, the insurgent separatist movement banned TV in the two southern Somalia towns of Barawe and Bulomarer. The reason advanced for this ban is that the group hoped to neutralise all forms of TV broadcasting that re-enforced Al-Shabaab's image as a predator and a threat to peace in the Horn of Africa. As put by Reporters without Borders (2013), "This ban's real target is TV news stations, which annoy Al-Shabaab by

showing viewers not only its atrocities but also the progress that the population has made in the regions from which Al-Shabaab has been expelled". Besides disrupting central states' TV-based campaigns, some separatist movements have allegedly infiltrated state-owned television stations or seek ways of fuelling separatist undercurrents in government-owned televisions. On May 15, 2005 for instance, two Ethiopian journalists, Shiferraw Insermu and Dhabassa Wakjra working with the Oromo-language service of the state-owned *Ethiopian Television* (ETV) were arrested and detained following suspicions that they had links with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a separatist group (McKenzie & Park 2009). Thus, the urge to control, influence or disrupt television broadcasting in favour of their goals has, of recent, been part of separatist insurgents' and terrorist groups' war strategies in Africa. In other words, television and the other screen media have been a complex site of extremism in Africa.

In view of countering this insurgent groups' use of the audio-visual media, African governments have deployed strategies that range from counter-terror and authoritarianism to post-truths and propaganda. In Cameroon for instance, the government has since 2013 entrenched the culture of banning cable-distributors that enable the diffusion of Ambazonia separatist channels. The same trend has been observed in Nigeria where the government has constantly jammed or closed Islamist radio stations operating in the northern part of the country. These muscular actions against extremist groups' "televisual dissidence" are yet to deter newer clandestine actions by the insurgents to get their message on the air. Additionally, some central states have entrenched systems that are totally and blindly adverse to any media contents that dare evoke separatism or cover the cause and plight of the insurgents in their territories. In 2015 for instance, the Algerian government shut private broadcaster *El Watan TV* for airing an interview with Madani Mezrag, a former Islamist insurgent and founder of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS). During the "subversive" interview, Mezrag attacked president Bouteflika for barring him from creating his own political party (El-Assawi 2017). In its sanction message, the Algerian communication ministry claimed that *El Watan TV* "operates in an illegal manner and broadcasts subversive content and was detrimental to state symbols" (Amnesty International 2015, p.2). A similar scenario occurred in Burkina Faso in April 26, 2023, when the country's media regulatory organ, the High Council for Communication banned French television news channel *LCI* for three months over a broadcast that the Burkinabe government deemed misleading and disruptive to its anti-insurgents efforts in the country. Actually, *LCI* – which the all news channel of the *Television France International 1* group – had on the 25th of that month reported that "jihadists advance at full speed in the absence of the State in conquered areas" and that the VDP volunteer force was being "used as cannon fodder to protect Burkinabe soldiers from the terrorists". In its banning statement, the High Council for Communication complained that LCI's broadcast was "malicious insinuations" likely to "create trouble among the people and weaken the necessary cooperation between the army and civilians to safeguard the Burkinabe homeland".

All the above government strategies to fight "televisual dissidence" in their territories have most often raised issues of violation of the right to information, information warfare and multifaceted authoritarianism which, so far, have remained understudied. Previous research has mainly focused on separatist insurgents' and terrorist groups' use of the social media for terror, online extremism, or rebel diplomacy (Cox et al 2019, ITU 2019, Mahler, Montes & Newhouse 2019, Aly, Weimann & Weimann 2014). No serious scholarly attention has been devoted particularly to television and the other screen media as a battlefield for both pro and anti-separatism forces. Meanwhile, television remains a key tool for both central states and insurgents' efforts towards reaching and controlling the minds of local audiences in particular. According to *Article 19* (2023), television is the most controlled medium in Africa. How have separatist insurgents and terrorist movements challenged this government control of television in Africa is still grossly understudied. Understanding the ramifications of this struggle to control the minds of local screen media audiences may enable better policy formulation in African states confronted by separatist and terrorist movements. In view of filling the gap mentioned above, the current volume seeks to examine how government institutions' and separatist movements' efforts towards controlling television and other screen media in African territories, is giving birth to new broadcasting policy and practices as well all as postmodern televisual cultures and aesthetics.

Against this background, the present project focuses on engaging academics in various disciplines to interrogate television broadcasting and other screen media as a site of the information war opposing African governments and separatist groups since the independence period. The editor, therefore, calls for chapters relating to:

- Broadcasting laws, separatism and terrorism in Africa
- The screen media as a clandestine communication tool for insurgent groups in Africa
- International TV Channels and pro or anti-insurgent propaganda in Africa
- Telefilms, separatism and terrorism in Africa
- Foreign states, the screen media and insurgencies in Africa
- Insurgent groups, screen media and rebel diplomacy
- Audiences' reception of insurgent television-based propaganda
- Local television coverage of terrorism and separatism
- Screen media, Non-Governmental Organisations and peace building in beak-away regions
- Security agencies, screen media and insurgencies
- Television, extremism and media ethics in Africa
- Media personnel and separatist undercurrents in state-owned television
- Screen media, vigilante groups and jungle justice in zones under insurgents' control
- Extremism, screen media, aesthetics of violence and media literacy in Africa
- Insurgents' use of TV: the African *vs* the non-African experience
- Documentary films on the genesis and evolution of secession calls
- Screen media, religious beliefs and extremist groups in Africa
- Screen media, the fight for justice and separatist groups

Submission Procedure:

Abstracts of not more than 400 words and brief authors' bios can be submitted to the following email addresses on or before **November 15, 2024**: floribertendong2019@gmail.com and floribertendong@yahoo.com. Notifications of acceptance or rejection will be given by **November 30, 2024**. Authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to submit their full chapters by **March 15, 2025**. The 7th edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style should be used. The font should be Times New Roman 12 and the word count should be a maximum of 6000. The prospective publisher for this book project is Palgrave MacMillan or Taylor and Francis.

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