

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

### **Between Three Continents: Rethinking Equatorial Guinea on the Fortieth Anniversary of Its Independence from Spain**

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#### **Continuity and change in the political economy apropos Equatorial Guinea**

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This paper tries to confront the general paradigm of “resource curse” in the case of Equatorial Guinea inserting the discovery and exploitation of oil in concrete and broad historical and regional processes. It is argued that the new production has implied, since the mid-1990s, continuities and transformations in the way power is exercised and experienced in different constituencies and localities.

#### **1. The *resource curse* in relation to Equatorial Guinea**

By the turn of the century, many in Equatorial Guinea started to realize that initial optimism about the potential for oil for improvement of social conditions in the country was not so well founded. It was not necessary to be conscious of the academic literature on the paradoxical social effects of oil extraction, to realize that since the arrival of American oil companies, the international pressures towards a greater democratization of the country had basically stopped. It was the case that huge revenues generated by the new oil administration remained in hands of government officials, with no immediate consequence for the majority of the Guinean population.

Indeed, the oil production in Equatorial Guinea has gone from 17 barrels per day (bpd) in 1996 to 350.000 or 400.000 bpd nowadays, which represents around 80% of the PIB of the country, and 95% of the National Budget.<sup>2</sup> However, according to the Human Development Index (PNUD), this economic growth has not translated into a substantial amelioration of the wellbeing of the overall population. Equatorial Guinea is ranked in fact as the third country in the world with a bigger difference between the GDP per capita rank (73) and the Human Development Index rank (127) (HDI, 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> See BANK OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES (BEAC), *Guinée Equatoriale: Données Statistiques de Base*, [www.beac.int](http://www.beac.int); IMF, Country Report 06/237, *Republic of Equatorial Guinea: Selected Issues and Statistical Appendix*, June 2006; National Budget of Equatorial Guinea, 2009.

Equatorial Guinea appears to fit well in the model proposed by some scholars around ideas such as the *rentier state*, the *resource curse* or the *paradox of plenty* (see for example MAHDAVY, 1970; BEBLAWI & LUCIANI, 1987; YATES, 1996; AUTY, 1993, KARL, 1997 AND 2005, HUMPHREYS, SACHS AND STIGLITZ, 2007). These authors point out to the tendency of countries dependent on production and exportation of minerals and hydrocarbons to be subjected to authoritarian political mechanisms and economic processes of general impoverishment through the activation of state renterism and neopatrimonialism.

This model has the merit of highlighting the relationship between economic activities and political forms, in contexts of massive production and export of natural resources. However, the idea of common dynamics to all countries dependent on export of minerals and oil does not sufficiently attend to specific historical trajectories and situated exercise of power. The despotism and exclusion suffered in Equatorial Guinea is not identical to those suffered in other places exploiting oil. Oil has its own specific genealogy that is site-specific. This awareness requires, therefore, of a more particular rapprochement and careful analysis, paying close attention to local and historical contexts.

Another weakness of the academic literature is the predilection for the framework of the national format. Two factors have to be taken into account: state power is always exercised in various ways across the national territory, and therefore specific *topographies of rule* created in a context of enclave production should be addressed (BOONE, 2003). Secondly, the oil industry is a trans-boundary enterprise clearly transcending the frontiers and the institutions of the productive countries. Concepts such as *rentier state* do not help us to understand the direct participation of transnational actors such as oil companies, or the IMF, in the making of social order. International institutions and agreements or principles such as the *sovereignty principle* are fundamental elements for the ways in which oil extraction contributes to the articulation of power in an oil-producing state. In an early conclusion, we need to acquire better conceptual tools to grasp the diversity of power relations in a place interpenetrated by wide economic and social processes.

The following pages will address the political economy of oil in the context of Equatorial Guinea and insert it in a broader history of integration in the world economy within the timeframe of the last century and a half. I will also pay attention to connections with productive and commercial activities of oil and gas. Finally, I will highlight some of the social and economic transformations that oil economy is generating in the country, and how these are interacting with power articulations at the national level.

## **2. Historical trajectories of economic connections around Bioko Island**

The Gulf of Guinea has been historically informed by intense transboundary and transoceanic connections. These connections have often been characterized, though not always, by an enclave and *thin* nature, and specially by an intense variation throughout the ages. These social and political configurations have often been marked by exclusion and despotism. The recent integration of Equatorial Guinea into the oil world market industry is part of a larger history of this African region.

It was during the period of slave trade abolition that the colonial city of Clarence, on Bioko island (Fernando Poo for the Europeans of the time), was founded in 1827. Clarence was set up as the operation base for the British Navy to crack down on slave trading ships operating in the Gulf of Guinea. This settlement forced the Bubi indigenous population to share the island with a small community of creole Africans who came from Western African British settlements and emancipated slaves, who were soon referred to as Fernandinos.

The island of Bioko's slow and gradual integration into the Atlantic economy started thus in the relatively late era of slave abolition, with the commerce on palm oil, which took over the general population's forms of subsistence agriculture. British companies, which were dominant between 1835 and 1843, were substituted by a creole African elite named Fernandinos (SUNDIATA, 1996).

In the last third of the 19th century, when the Spanish Government was already established in the colonial city, re-named Santa Isabel, palm oil trade gave ground to a plantation economy based on cocoa (SANZ CASAS, 1993; SUNDIATA, 2003, CAMPOS, 2005). The main beneficiaries of this commerce were medium-size planters, Fernandinos and Spaniards, who were gradually being substituted by modest local farmers and big Spanish commercial companies (SANT, 2008).

The shortage of manpower in the big cocoa plantations was endemic. But the abolition of the slave trade in the Atlantic, and later of slavery itself, had created a certain social class with an undefined personal status who were available to work as cheap temporary farm workers in various degrees of forced labour conditions. Although contracts were officially written, working conditions in the colony were mostly in essence "paid temporary servitude" (CLAVERO, 2006).

The European colonial partition of Africa at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the demarcation of the Spanish colony, adding the small continental territory of Río Muni, between German and French colonies, to Bioko and other small islands.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless It was only in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century that military control was imposed over the total Bioko (1900s) and Río Muni (1920s) territories.

During its existence, the Spanish colonial project underwent numerous transformations, from a narrow presence of colonialists settled in the capital and cacao plantations, to a wider integration of the whole population in the economic and governmental structure of the colony. The specific forms that this integration assumed went from the obligation of compulsory labour for Africans in plantations, infrastructures and public works, to their unplanned participation in the growing of commercial crops as small-size farmers. Colonial law transformed the colonized into "indigenous people",<sup>4</sup> in order to limit their rights of participation into the economic and public spaces of the colony, eventually reproducing a strong dichotomy between *europesos* and *indígenas*, dichotomy between *citizens* and *subjects* (MAMDANI, 1996; CAMPOS, 2005)

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<sup>3</sup> In 1900, the Treaty of Paris signed by France and Spain established the limits between the French Gabon and the Spanish Guinea.

<sup>4</sup> The different categories of *Europeans* and *indigenes* were fixed with the creation in 1928 of the *Patronato de Indígenas*: CAMPOS, 2005.

The authoritarian Francoist regime, established after the Spanish Civil War, involved a stronger interference of the colonial apparatus in the daily lives of colonial population. Colonialism ceased being an enclave presence, to become a much more socially intrusive project. Apart from cocoa, other sectors were developed, such as timber in Río Muni. New treaties were signed with Nigerian British authorities to import manpower to Bioko. From that moment onwards, there was always a large immigrant population in the island, whose rights were even more restricted than those of the “indigenous people” of Guinea.

During last decade of colonial domination, and 20 years later than other European powers, the Madrid government implemented a developmental program involving investments on infrastructures, primary education and health services. At the same time, Spanish Guinea enjoyed since 1964 a kind of self-government regime, *Régimen de Autonomía*, which Africanised the colonial administration and promoted the participation of part of the African elite in new institutions, such as the *Consejo de Gobierno* (Government Council). This was a consequence in large part of the pressure of nationalist groups inside the country and in the exile, who found in the United Nations and in the Afroasiatic group of states a convincing opposition vehicle mobilizing the fears of the Francoist regime in relation to international isolation (CAMPOS, 2002 y 2003).

By 1960, colonialism was already considered a violation of the Declaration of Human Rights, as ratified in the resolution 1514(XV) of the UN General Assembly, and international pressures forced a negotiated decolonization and the establishment of the independent state of Equatorial Guinea in 1968. Therefore, the international arena played a big part in the manner decolonization took place and the results that took place thereafter: the United Nations fostered a negotiated exit to the colonial tension, and promoted a unified independence between the two main parts of the territory.

After independence, and the modernisation language of the government notwithstanding, there were few investments in basic infrastructure. The colonial economy all but collapsed and Equato-Guinean families focused on subsistence farming. Old colonizers first, and Nigerian workers later on, left the territory. The state administration persisted thanks to the international aid from the old colonial power, France and socialist countries, the USSR and China. A never clarified attempted coup d'etat justified the imposition of a terror government by the elected president, Macías Nguema, in March 1969, five months after independence. The repression reached the old colonial as well as the nationalist elite, and terror and fear became the main instrument of power. The state was restructured around Nguema's family, making Guinean politics a family affair. And the opposition was hardly able to create a movement in exile ANRD based in Spain, which rallied little international support against the Nguema regime.

In terms of the international insertion of the new state, Spain, due to its weakness and the way independence was reached, lost most of its influence and economic presence after its withdrawal. New international connections appeared, including those with socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union and China., In spite of long-lasting disagreements between the governments of Spain and Equatorial Guinea, Spain became the main donor, but also the main recipient outside of Africa of Guinean emigrants. The exiled political opposition made Spain their base.

International norms relating to self-determination and sovereignty played also a big part supporting the postcolonial state. During decolonization, international recognition did not depend on effective participation of the population in the state structure, and newly independent government could rely on the non-intervention principle to justify and to reject any external denunciation of the repression of internal dissidence. Postcolonial opponents did not find in the international norms the support that anti-colonial nationalists had found. Therefore, international norms and international aid upheld a government based on fear and repression.

At the beginning of the 1980s, all these economic and political dynamics brought the postcolonial states to a crisis that was economic as well as one of legitimacy. In exchange for their financial support, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank demanded the almost complete dismantling of what remained of the nationalist approach to development. The new economic orthodoxy attacked the idea of the state as promoter of modernisation and advocated that free market was the main instrument to meet developmental goals and leave the crisis behind.

During the liberal moment of the 1980s, Equatorial Guinea managed a certain rapprochement with Western countries. The nephew of the dictator, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, staged an internal palace coup against his uncle in 1979 and encouraged expectations of democratisation and a new influx of western aid. In fact, despotic forms of rule continue under Obiang Nguema, funded on the fear spread during his uncle government and previous colonial decade. But the quality of the integration of the country in the world economy and the politics of it changed with the new regime.

Multilateral aid flowed to the country and bilateralism with Spain was in place. The new government signed an *agreement on friendship and cooperation* with the old colonial power, Spain, which sent numerous Spanish technicians to the old colony during the 1980s. The United Nations helped to organise two conferences in 1982 and 1988 with a *Round Table of Donor Countries*, where they adopted an economic development program. Equatorial Guinea entered the Franco CFA zone in 1988 and the multilateral agreements between EU and ACP countries. Finally, the government accepted an IMF proposal of Structural Adjustment Facility in 1988. During those years, external aid became the main resource for the state since economic activity was not reactivated.

But there were other commercial transactions that found fundamental intermediaries in high-ranking officials. Exportation of timber from tropical forests grew in the 1980s to 158.000 cubic meters in 1990 (and 733.900 in 2000),<sup>5</sup> and was controlled by Asian companies and the President's son at the Ministry of Forestry. On the other hand, officials and probably the same President participated directly in drug trafficking, carrying it from Latin American and Asian countries to Europe (WOOD, 2004; CIDDE). The immunity of their diplomatic passports allowed them to avoid rigid border controls of the countries they visited.

As we have seen, the economic links of the territories of Equatorial Guinea with other distant places in the world have suffered numerous transformations during last two

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<sup>5</sup> BEAC, *Guinée Equatoriale: Données Statistiques de Base*, [www.beac.int](http://www.beac.int).

centuries. Each economic moment has brought different kinds of labour relations and has been managed by different social groups. Oil exportation is only the last version of this engagement with the world at large.

### **3. Family, oil and sovereignty in Equatorial Guinea**

The 1990s brought important transformations in the transnational connections that also inevitably pass through the Equatorial-Guinean territory. These were related, firstly to the political effects of the end of Cold War and the constitutional reforms that were spreading throughout the African continent; and secondly to the discovery and exploitation of huge deposits of oil in the sea area of the Exclusive Economic Zone of Equatorial Guinea.

A new constitution in 1991 established a multiparty system with periodic elections for the legislative assembly, the presidency and the town councils. Up to thirteen political parties, apart from the government *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDG), were recognised. The Nguema's in government learned soon how to manipulate elections and their results and how to intimidate citizens to refrain them from participating in political activities. International donors, with new discourses after the Cold War, replied by halting support of the political transition (ABAGA, 1997; ESCRIBANO, 1999). The Spanish government cancelled most of its institutional aid programs in 1994 and the Clinton Administration closed the US embassy and the rural development programs of the Peace Corps two years later. In 1996, the IMF suspended its programs due to lack of accomplishment of fiscal measures and also due to corruption.

In August 1993, the country suffered the effects of the devaluation of CFA franc. The economic crisis that followed pushed Equatorial Guinean government to request again foreign support. Donors, especially the Spanish foreign ministry, took advantage of the situation and made external aid subject to the fairness of the next election. Actually, due in part to this pressure, local elections in September 1995 are considered the fairest of all since 1991. The opposition proposed a joint list that won 19 out of 27 town councils (though ultimately government only recognised 9). These events were proof of the intense connections between strategies of local actors and donors' policies this new, cleaner dynamics, however, did not continue in subsequent elections.

In fact, during those same years, the American independent *Walter International* started exploitation of Alba field opposite Malabo coasts in 1991. The ascendancy of aid agents and diplomats almost disappeared with the arrival of representatives of big oil corporations, mostly Americans. The landing of American businessmen at the time the US ambassador was leaving and the US embassy was closing, is a good symbol of all this new situation monopolized by international corporations and not by state agents. From the beginning therefore, American companies have dominated the oil production in Equatorial Guinea, although there are always other governments, from Spain to China, who are looking for participating in the new oil (EIA, 2007).

The extraction of oil by foreign companies has, first of all, empowered the government of Equatorial Guinea, and has provided the Nguema family who occupies it with new economic and diplomatic resources. But the new richness and the new actors have not

altered much of the old authoritarian modes of governance, which are expressed in different forms and new spheres of influence. As a general rule, the power of the state is distinguished by its *non-regulative* character and the *privatized* forms in which it is often exercised.

In terms of electoral politics, the open fraud in the periodic elections, in which the president's party always claims more than 95% of the vote, deserves since the beginning of oil exploitation in mid-1990s more than soft condemnations of international organizations and donors. Violence against political dissidents and population in general has continued despite the oil companies; furthermore, oil companies pay for the services of the security company owned by Obiang's brother, a known torturer. Opposition has suffered a periodic process of fragmentation and absorption by the party in power, and repression has reached exiled dissidents in neighbouring countries. All this contributes to the repressive engines that have helped to maintain the government, traditionally based on the fear and the passivity of the bulk of the population.

In addition to fear, patronage is the other mechanism that links government with part of the population. Oil resources have helped President Obiang to intensify the politics of patronage and clientelism. Temptation to collaborate with the party in government to get a job or simply avoid police harassment is bigger and bigger since the discovery of oil. However, most of the oil revenues remain in few hands. Most of the payments of oil companies to the State of Equatorial Guinea are made, not to the state Treasury account in the *Bank of Central African States* (BEAC), but to personal bank accounts abroad, like the ones in Riggs Bank exposed by the United States' Senate Report of 2004. These payments seem to be compensation of shareholding agreements extremely favourable to oil companies. The privatization of relations between state and oil companies have been reinforced by the creation of the national companies *GEPetrol*, in February 2001, and *SonagasGE* in 2005; together they formally represent the government in shareholding contracts with trans-national companies for oil and gas exploration and production, as well as taking part in some *joint ventures*.

Relations between the oil industry and the Nguema family have provided the latter with new mechanisms of both personal richness and social control and exclusion, in spheres such as labour, building or security. Relevant members of the government control the employment agencies through which the oil industry draws on the relatively reduced number of Equato-Guinean workers the companies need, and they retain over 50% of workers' wages, sometimes even 70%. Government imposes the participation of these agencies, which demand a membership card of the governing party to get a job and thanks to which dissidents and known opposition members are totally excluded of this new source of salaried employment (CAMPOS & MICÓ, 2006).

The big companies' demands for land are also satisfied by members of government, as the land and buildings rented or sold to them usually belong to the President or his brothers, quite often after a forced expropriation from the previous owners or occupants. Security services of American compounds are also monopolized by a sole company, *Sociedad Nacional de Vigilancia* (SONAVI), owned by Obiang's brother, former Director of National Security and known torturer Armengol Ondó Nguema, the former Minister of National Security. The enjoyment of all such accumulated richness by the Equato-Guinean elite has

gone abroad, through the investments of the Nguema family on luxurious residences in Spain or the United States (US SENATE, 2004).

On the other hand, any attempt of business, with local or transnational capital, without the participation of a member of the Nguema family is systematically undermined by administrative difficulties or the direct intervention of the police. Along with a favourable environment for big businesses, small producers and entrepreneurs find many political obstacles to their economic activity. The end result is that the enclave oil economy reinforces the state as the main social source of accumulation. In fact, oil has narrowed the group in power, which suffered from periodical internal conflicts around oil distribution. The non distribution of revenues among the population is part of the politics of impoverishment that explain the lack of basic sanitary stuff in hospitals and drinking water in cities, as well as the deficient education.

The new economic context has therefore not altered the despotic and non-regulative manner in which state power is exercised; but it did not altered either the group that holds power since independence. As we have said earlier, the political groups that led the colonial administration, the decolonization process, and the postcolonial government have found many of their political resources outside the affected local population. This trend has been described by Jean-François BAYART (2002) as a process of *extraversion* of power, in a continent historically difficult for any attempt to accumulate power and capital on local bases. With its enclave nature, oil has contributed to reinforce this dynamic. The redundant character of the bulk of population for the maintenance of those in power has made repression, cooptation and poverty the main ties between Equato-Guineans and the state administration.

The relevance of the Nguema's clan for the extractive industries is not based therefore on the former's actual and military control of offshore oilfields, which does not exist, but on their control of the government of Equatorial-Guinea since independence, and the international conventions around *sovereignty*. Today, the interpretation of the principle of sovereignty establishes that the legal representatives of the population with capacity to negotiate on the soil richness are those who occupy the government, with independence of its legitimacy or actual control of the territory. Far from dissolving or questioning the state, the transnational oil industry is reinforcing its institutional dimension, as well as the groups who occupy it, without taking into account the means they used to arrive to power and to retain it. (CAMPOS, 2008).

The state of Equatorial Guinea appears thus as a *Jano State*, which guarantees the investments of the transnational companies on the one hand, and becomes a menace for the wellbeing of the majority of the population on the other. It is a specific *gate-keeper state* (COOPER, 2004), which makes those who control power unavoidable mediators between the oil industry and the natural resources, and whose main interest is to avoid the economic or political competence of autonomous social groups inside the national territory.

#### **4. Political continuities and social transformations**

We have insisted earlier on the historical continuities in the manner of exercising power in Equatorial Guinea, based on the extraversion of government political and economic resources, and the role of the state as the main mediator between the territory and the foreign actors. This notwithstanding, there have also existed main transformations in the way in which different social groups have been integrated, or excluded, in the modes of production and government, as well as in the individual and collective reactions towards the mechanisms of political control.

In recent times, we have been able to observe some ongoing transformations in the way state power and company power is experienced by different people in different spaces. Even in a small country like Equatorial Guinea, with an empowered government, the idea of *topographies of power* pushes us to see power relations in a more nuanced way. There are, first of all, those new spaces controlled directly by the oil companies, and where the political dynamics described above stay at the door. They are basically the sea platforms, and the company compounds (where the staff work, and where the expatriates live when in land). These are spaces where the international regulations on the oil industry or those of the companies' home country dominate over the legislation of Equatorial Guinea, except for the reduced number of native workers. As Fernando ABAGA (1996) pointed out, foreign investments in an oil economy are highly encapsulated, and little of it reaches the population at large. Few Equato-Guineans are able to get a salaried job in the platforms and oil companies, due to the highly specialized and internationalised labour. The enclave character of oil is reinforced by its off-shore nature and the strong security measures needed to maintain plants and compounds.

Meanwhile, in the mainland the traditional spatial differentiation for the exercise of power between the villages and the main towns has been reinforced, as the commercial and subsistence agriculture activities and the rural quarters have been massively abandoned. At present it is not only the youth who migrate to the towns leaving behind family structures and properties, but almost everyone leaving aspires to stay near those who are trying to make a living in the urban areas. Rural areas are becoming as the *facto* empty spaces, where old forms of control are massively avoided by the classic escaping mechanism. This time, people are not looking for more empty spaces or crossing a state border, but going to the populated towns in the same country, where the state do not have the traditional indirect forms of government.

Simultaneously, many other migrants are arriving to the Equatorial Guinean towns, from near and distant places. The region around the Gulf of Guinea has historically been a space of intense transboundary movements of people, for family, labour, religious, political and/or health reasons. But we have witnessed a change in migration flows during the last few years. Cameroon, traditionally a receiving territory of Equatorial-Guinean exiles and immigrants, has become the point of origin of most of the African expatriates who live in Malabo and Bata today. Nigerian and Gabonese citizens are also attracted by informal commerce or construction. Traffic of people, mostly domestic working children or prostituted women, has also increased exponentially.

On the other hand, only a small part of the workers on the oil plants and platforms comes from Equatorial Guinea and the near region. They constitute different enclave communities, like those Americans living in the oil compounds, or the Asiatic workers of

the platforms who hardly ever tread on dry land (CAMPOS & MICÓ, 2006). Chinese small merchants and workers are also arriving, along with Chinese construction companies. The traditional Lebanese migration has also grown (ESTEBAN, 2009). As for Equatorial-Guinean migrants abroad, the recent economic crisis has provoked the return of many of them from Spain, in search for new opportunities at home.

Here we encounter the paradox that I am trying to analyse in my ongoing research. As we have mentioned, the enclave nature of oil economy, which dominates the country, and the non-developmental character of government politics, do not encourage the creation of many salaried jobs or economic activities. However, the growing internal migration to the country's main towns are indicative of the economic opportunities that people find in an environment dominated by big companies and repressive government. In spite of the government's obstacles, and even indifference, towards the creation of an economic fabric, new sectors have grown over the last few years, against the abandonment of more traditional activities. Activities such as construction, private security, transport, hostelry, petit-commerce, or prostitution, are attracting more and more workers, in a context of extreme informality and deregulation. The small, but growing, salaried group composed of state officials, oil workers, and expatriates is favouring these processes. The main condition seems to be the compliance of the non-written law which permits some free action to those who accept PDGE hegemony and are not politically active in opposition parties.

The arriving of people from so many different places is provoking a spatial fragmentation of the political landscape of the towns: the city centre, the company compounds, the new neighbourhoods at the outskirts, the informal suburbs, or the Chinese surroundings, all of them constitute differentiated places where the power of the state is articulated in different ways. Whereas immigrants from the region tend to look for habitat in the same surroundings as the native population, the rest of foreign workers live in specific places, with specific legal frameworks and relations with the government. Immigrants coming from neighbouring countries tend to suffer situations of extortion and harassment coming from the security forces, which carries out, on a regular basis, sudden arrests and massive expulsions of Cameroonian people with no prior notice.

The legal fiction of the state plays here another role in the exercise of power in Equatorial Guinea, contributing to define categories of people with different status inside the territory, and legitimizing the exclusion of the rights of many of them. The sovereignty convention distinguishes not only between nationals and foreigners, but between different kinds of foreigners as well: the diverse capacity of the states of origin to defend their citizens' rights explains the unequal treatment that people from Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, or the United States receive from the security bodies.

Finally, we should mention other transnational connections around Equatorial Guinea, different from the alliance between Nguema family and oil companies, or the ones created by immigrants. They have created in some cases political spaces different to the state, in which alternative political projects are defined. They have also allowed the maintenance of certain spaces of autonomy inside the country to the local participants in those connections, which has given them some additional leverage in their negotiation with the government.

Less visible but longer in time, opposition groups have created linkages with other social or political movements in distant spaces. Equato-Guinean parties that emerged during the constitutional reforms of early 1990s became some of the few spaces of political autonomy vis-à-vis the government. Nevertheless, they have suffered the strategies of cooptation and repression by the government, which have turned many of them into exiles or partners with PDGE in government. Survival of political opposition inside the territory of Equatorial Guinea has required of physical and economic personal fortitude, as well as the capacity to connect with other actors outside the country, in a kind of alternative extraversion.

Some transnational organizations of human rights, for their part, like Amnesty International, have found in members of opposition parties, not only victims of violations that need to be defended, but also sources of information on the situation of human rights in Equatorial Guinea. For its part, oil has also promoted the interest on Equatorial Guinea on the transnational social movements in favour of transparency in the extractive industries, such as the campaign *Publish What You Pay* (see Global Witness, 2004). As a reaction to these campaigns, the Equatorial-Guinean government has shown a strong interest to participate in the *Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative* EITI of Tony Blair's government, and to get IMF certificate of transparency.

Not all this transboundary relationship is, however, completely "legal". The failed *coup d'état* by a group of South African and Armenian mercenaries detained in Malabo and Harare in March 2004 revealed a network that linked private security companies, exiled Equato-Guinean opponents in Madrid, and business men such as former British prime Minister's son Mark Thatcher. South African and Zimbabwean authorities informed in a timely manner their counterparts in Malabo, who detained, tortured, and judged 11 people.<sup>6</sup> The repressive and exclusive character of Equato-Guinean government, along with the general greed for oil, makes it especially vulnerable to the generation of alliances that mirror those that maintain the political order.<sup>7</sup>

To conclude, oil production links the territory of Equatorial Guinea with other places in different ways and it creates specific topographies of power inside it. The integration of the most urban parts of the country in specific transnational processes such as oil industry has meant continuities as well as transformations in the way power is created and exercised all along the territory.

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<sup>6</sup> *African Confidential*, January, April, July and December 2004, March, January and October 2004; BBC 13 January 2005.

<sup>7</sup> However, many coup d'état accusations in the country are periodically made up by the authorities in order to justify harsh repression against political dissidents and their families. That was the case of 2002 trial against FDR members and CPDS Secretary General, Plácido Micó. Amnesty International, 2002.

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