

Political History of Equatorial Guinea: “The Rise and Entrenchment of Nguemism”

(Geoffrey Wood, 2004: p. 548)

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Abstract

Since the 1960s watershed events of decolonization, the African state has remained locked in monarchist’s chains, outwardly fragile and denied the opportunity of transiting into mature, predictable, stable and developing states. This has been the lived experience of Equatorial Guinea, awarded independence from Spain through the technical intervention of the United Nations in 1968, after the violent reign of two presidents over the fifty years, the incumbent, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has anointed his son, “Teodorin” to become the future leader. Meanwhile, several courts in the United States, Switzerland, Spain and more recently, in February 2020, a French Court found him guilty of squandering public monies through an extravagant lifestyle and following the now established international norm, confiscated and auctioned the assets luxury mansions, fast cars, yachts and airplanes in order to donate the proceeds towards impoverished Equatoguineans. The challenge is therefore that, for more than three generations, Equatorial Guinea leadership will remain in the hands of the Nguemas notwithstanding the periodic and farcical multiparty elections since 1991. Using secondary sources, country reports, academic thesis and dissertation as well as newspaper reports, this article traces the accession to power and power retention strategies and his intention of 2016 appointing his son as the First Vice President and constitutional heir after his long reign of four decades and its political implications? This research is about the nature of political leadership and democratic succession in Africa. In the case of Equatorial Guinea, this reveals a case of arrested political transition under the tutelage of family rule that appears to have marginalised constitutional institutions while creating a parallel power consolidation leadership typology and culture.

Keywords

Equatorial Guinea, Fragile State, Incumbent, Political, Power Retention,

Dominance

1. Introduction

There are instances in the political governance globally where ruling classes attempt to defy the predictions of the renowned Arab scholar, Ibn Khaldun who, six centuries ago posited that, “no dynasty lasts the life span of three generations.” (Yates, 2017: pp. 356-335; Ibn Khaldun, 1967: p. 107). We shall return later to this with a further detailed exposition of Khaldun’s theoretical explanation as it relates to the Equatorial Guinea case study below. More globally and in practice however, there are several versions of dynastic systems have come to represent enduring regime types of societal governance models. Fleeting evidence of this has been witnessed in the United States, Canada, India, Europe, Africa and Asia and particularly in the Middle East, in an omnipresent phenomenon, accounting for 25% of global leadership. Famous names such as the Kennedys and Bush families in the United States, Gandhi of India, Trudeau of Canada, the Assads in Syria, Husseins in Jordan, the Alaouites of Morocco, Khama in Botswana, Uhuru Kenyatta in Kenya and Mswatti Sobhuzha of Swaziland now renamed ESwatini, epitomize this continuing trend (Yates, 2017: pp. 339-340). These regime models or monarchs exist in the perpetual power structures established by their predecessors on whose reputations they rely upon to secure contemporary “elected presidencies” as has been the case in Togo with President Faure Eyadema’s and Gabon’s President Ben Ali Odimba Bongo, who succeeded their fathers who both died in office, in 2005 and 2009 respectively.

Beyond the presidents, there is also a second layer of successful fathers, who themselves did not attain the highest office but whose reputation and contribution is sufficiently endearing to propel their off-springs, generally sons into power but with a sprinkling of daughters. Amongst the most contemporary African examples is the recent case in the Democratic Republic of Congo of president Felix Tshisekedi, invited to lead his father’s political opposition movement after his death. The same is true of South African former President Thabo Mbeki whose father was one of the African National Congress (ANC) stalwarts, a development that also permeates amongst many of the ministers occupying leadership positions in the same country.

While the motives for the pursuit and retention of power in perpetuity are common, however, each case study operates in unique contexts from which the characteristics remain diverse. To this end, some of these family dynasties are in power and continue to be because of culture, customs, regional idiosyncrasies, religious tenets, constitutional provisions, historical affinity that includes, “born to rule” while others are sustained through political expediency, leading to “winning several elections” while others have become beholden to the self-reinforcing structural edifice, occupied by influential aides who themselves constitute special courts, responsible for shielding power usurpers while influencing the selection,

appointing and sustenance of successor leaderships reinforcing and re-energizing their continued stay in power even in brief moments when no clear family leaders is in the seat when leaders die. (Yates, 2017: pp. 339-340).

The power retention models of dynasties is replete with violence and repression and generally characterised by the marginalizing state institutions to become personalized entities unable to function for the greater good of citizens. As a result, disruption of this cycle appears to come only from violent reaction or military coup d'états as recently witnessed in the removal of President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan since his seizure of power from Jaafar Numeri in 1989. In that example, following the rapid economic decline manifest in bread and fuel riots amidst protracted strike by workers and professionals in December 2018 by February 2019, a military coup d'état ousted the Al-Bashir but has since been forced to share power in an interim arrangement with the civil society organisations that had the masses on the streets in protest.

Simon Bayham has made some of the most illustrative example of the military in politics. Citing literature and practical experiences throughout the world and Africa on this questions he argues that, once the armed forces have intervened in politics and tasted unbridled power it is almost impossible to get genie back into the bottle or to get them back into the barracks. In theory, the foot soldiers will appear to return but from that moment on, even within the barracks, there is a role transformation in that they are now poised to watch the political landscape ready to pounce if decisions taken are not to their liking. Making the argument to want to see them back in barracks is therefore mere wishful thinking once the umbilical cord is broken. The acquisition of a new political role by the armed forces exposes them to unaccustomed political demands and pressures well beyond their levels of training and normal expectation. As the arguments posits, thereafter, "they are likely to move in and out of the barracks to government in successive phases. Each time reinforcing the political nature of the military establishment, introducing further instability into the body politic." (Baynham, 1980: p. 67). Furthermore, the supplanting of the civilian regime by a military junta usually accentuates divisions inherent in the branches of the uniformed forces introducing new competitive scenarios of factionalism. In other words, the coherence of the military culture is rendered inoperable with new political divisions introduced that thrive on different, formal and informal power centres. With the military in politics, once ensconced in power, outside power groups seek alliance with segments of the military élite, introducing a new dynamic which is beyond the usual command and control chain while the soldiers find themselves divided in their attachment to civilians to whom, at some future date, they promise the reins of government. In undertaking this role, Military rule is then characterized by dizzying conspiracies, plots and counter-coups. Stated differently, the seizure of power destroys the strongest unifying feature of the army but, as Ruth First observed, "Once shattered, the sanction against a military coup is broken forever. A major-general or a brigadier who usurps state power must expect to be emulated by a colonel; and what one colonel can do, another can

copy...” (Baynham, 1980: p. 70). Thus all military regimes constantly live under the threat of a counter-coup by disaffected or ambitious soldiers, or by a combination of soldiers and civilians (Baynham, 1980: pp. 70-71).

Robert Williams also posits a similar argument when he writes that “in Africa competing political elites have a record of treating each other very badly.” (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 636). To this end, argues that:

Authoritarianism of most African political systems ... institutionalised in single-party or military-ruled states ... offer(ing) few opportunities for leaders to be changed by peaceful and non-coercive means ... political competition has taken on the configuration of a zero-sum game ... coups d'états where the stakes are extremely high: success leads directly to power (and, often, wealth), while failure is quite likely to have fatal consequences. Once established, such all-or-nothing situations become difficult to change because they are structurally self-perpetuating (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 636; Esteban, 2009: pp. 667-685).

On the African continent, a particularly illustrative and unique example is the unfolding developments in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea whose political history since independence on 12 October 1968, has only had two rulers: the inaugural President Francois Marcius Nguema (1968-1979) later by his “nephew” Teodoro Obiang Nguema (1979-to current May 2020). Teodoro succeeded Marcius on 3 August 1979 when he conducted the violent and ferocious “desirable military coup d'état” before jailing and within weeks, executed the former on 11 September 1979 president.

More recently and in a telling gesture, the 78-year-old president Nguema Mbasogo, reportedly suffering from a terminal sickness of prostate cancer, decided to hand over power to a son with a rather tainted international reputation and poor domestic popularity. While in 2012 Nguema had appointed his son, “Teodorin” Obiang Nguema as Vice President, in November 2016, he further elevated this to the First VP and setting in train the constitutional positioning for his ascendancy if the position became vacant (Liniger-Goumaz, 1989; Williams Jr., 2011: p. 620; Aworawo, 2010: pp. 95-97; Baynham, 1980: p. 65).

This is an article a historical tracing on how the Nguemas came to power and how they have been able to hold on to the same since independence in October 1968. It is therefore a reflection on the question of the state formation of African states as well as the difficulty to attain democratic consolidation (Clarence-Smith, 1990).

This research uses secondary sources and newspaper and country reports in order to better understand the leadership and political history of Equatorial Guinea since independence. Because of the dominance of the Nguemas in the political history of Equatorial Guinea, the article is organised in two sections looking at the reign and exit of Marcius Nguema before examining the era of Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo before making conclusions (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

2. The Post-Independence Era: President Francois Marcius Nguema: 12 October 1968 to 3 August 1979

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, following delayed granting of independence to the Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea, finally, as part of the deliberations and horse trading between African states and Spain in the United Nations, the former signalled its intention to relinquish control in 1967. The decision was then preceded by a referendum amongst the nationalists that presented two popular but competing candidates: Francisco Macias Nguema leading the Marxist oriented *Idea Popular de la Guinea Ecuatorial (IPGE)* and his political opponent, Atanasio Ndong Malone president of the *Movement Nacional de Liberation de la Guinea Ecuatorial (MONALIGE)*. In resolving the early impasse, the parties entered into a power sharing coalition during the first administration in which Marcius became the first President and Atanasio appointed Foreign Minister (Nunez, 2013: p. 55). The governance model in the former Spanish territory of Equatorial Guinea, characterized by violence and uniquely centralized power in the presidency was laid during the early months of independence, granted through the intervention of the United Nations on 12 October 1968.

However, five months into the post-colonial state Ndongo, while travelling from the UN via Spanish has been documented as then inspired by the former colonial intelligence services and its foreign ministry to mount a putsch in order to oust Nguema (Esteban, 2009: p. 668; Nunez, 2013: p. 55, p.67; Baynham, 1980: p. 67; Yates, 2017: p. 346).

With the support of the Spanish government, the Guinean minister attempted a coup d'état against Macias on the 5th of March 1969. After occupying the Presidential palace in Bata he was surprised by Macias who was supposed to be out of the city. Minutes later, Atanasio Ndong was thrown out of a window and captured by Macias guards when still alive. According to official sources, he was taken to the hospital where he died of the wounds (Alejandra Nunez, 2013: p. 19, pp. 52-55; Wood, 2004: pp. 548-549; Campos-Serrano, 2013: p. 315).

With Spain accused of complicity in the military coup d'état attempt, the president mounted a campaign to remove white settlers enmass. Furthermore, in the following year, on 2 February 1970 Macias consolidated his position by declaring a one party state, the Partido Unico Nacional (PUN) before assuming the position of life president in 1972. As the one party state culture permitted within the public service and the remaining public sector, African professionals, artisans and skilled persons also followed, benefiting from the historical, colonial citizenship granted to them as Spanish citizens. Furthermore, Macias launched a special attack on the Catholic Church, shutting down mission schools complete with hospitals and clinics (Nunez, 2013: pp. 52-55). Consequently, the absence of skilled persons and formal markets eventually led to the attendant collapse of agriculture and timber exploitation plantations resulting in the almost total destruction of the economy.

As part of implementing Nguemaism, “representing rule by a small family elite,” influential public and private positions were now occupied by clan members (Wood, 2004: p. 549). Macias Nguema’s family and his ethnic clan from (Mongomo-Fang Esangui) controlled all the institutions of government and state enterprises. By 1978 both the civilian ministries and armed forces were all dominated by members of the Nguema family. To this end, his cousin Esono Nguema took the dual positions of the Vice Presidency and Minister of Foreign Affairs replacing his former rival Atanasio. A nephew, Ayingono Oyono, simultaneously occupied the posts Minister of Finance, Minister of Trade and Industry, the Director of Information, Director-General of Security, Secretary of State for the Presidency, Chief of Protocol and Commissioner of for State Enterprises. A cousin, Feliciano Oyono was appointed Permanent Secretary of the Ruling Party, all paid positions by government revenues but influential in their performance in the political arena and organisation. Following a similar trend, yet another cousin, Oñana Mba, was placed in charge, commanded a company of the National Guard which served as part of the gendarmerie while another, Maye Ela, became military commander of Bata. Significantly in this discussion, another “nephew,” Obiang Nguema, was appointed commander in the National Guard, serving as the military governor of the renamed Fernando Po Island (Bioko) now known as Masie Nguema (Liniger-Goumaz, 1989: p. 61). Clearly, political, high value economic and the close security of the presidency and the state all was in the hands of the Nguemas’ brothers, nephews and cousins. While supremely restructured the Nguema security machinery launched the terror campaign under President Macias (Clarence-Smith, 1990).

2.1. Reign of Terror President Macias

The first to be arrested and summarily executed were the 11 members of the autonomous government which had ruled the country before independence from 1964 to 1968. This was designed to decapitate the political coherence and disrupt any future coherence or reference to existing power centres in the country. Furthermore, subsequent purges targeted 22 High Officials of Macias’s own government; nine members of the National Assembly’s 35 elected deputies; five members of the state’s two Provincial Councils; two of the six members of the Council of the Republic. The latter body had been established within the nascent coalition and democratic environment with the responsibility to undertake mediation in disputes between the executive and legislature denoting that each had separate and independent status. A further 67 civil servants with at least two dozen army and police officers and Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs). In the private sector, an indeterminate number of businessmen, students, farmers and even traditional chiefs were forcibly rounded up and killed. Among the more prominent victims were Jesus Oworo Ndongo who was Minister of Justice, killed in May 1971. Expedito Momo Bocara who had succeeded Ndongo’s at the Justice Ministry was also executed in May 1974) while Roman Toichoa who was Minister of Labour was killed together with Bocara in May 1974. Gustavo Bueco, Am-

bassador to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea's highest ranking career diplomat, was also killed during a brief visit home in 1971 (Simon Baynham, 1980: p. 67; Campos-Serrano, 2013: p. 315; Nunez, 2013: p. 61; Clarence-Smith, 1990).

Given the horrendous abuse of human rights in which lives were lost without international concern, particularly from Spain the former colonial power, in October 1978, Amnesty International (AI) sent an appeal to the African Unity Organisation (OAU) urging restraint and action towards preventing further violations of human rights in Equatorial Guinea (Alejandra Nunez, 2013: p. 64).

2.2. Overthrow President Marcius Nguema-Lieutenant Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema

The change in attitude of the nephews and cousins in charge of the security sector came with the move towards targeting some of them. Geoffrey Wood writes of the execution of a close nephew of Teodoro Obiang Nguema in 1979 which may have been the last straw, prompting the officers to begin plotting the removal of Macias from power (Wood, 2004: p. 549). However, credible reports also allude to the involvement of the Spanish intelligence in the military coup d'état against Macias:

Randall Fegley claimed that the Spanish intelligence was behind the plot to finish with Macias as Spain was for years awaiting for a chance to eliminate him¹. What is clearly certain is the fact that right after the coup in August 1979, and for the first time in a decade, Spain regained its presence in the former colony through the arrival of State representatives together with dozens of Spanish journalists (Nunez, 2013: p. 55).

By this time, Macias 11-year rule had resulted in as many as 80,000 deaths and over 350,000 fleeing to neighbouring states' capitals of Yaoundé and Libreville in Cameroon and Gabon respectfully while others went to Madrid, Spain. The skilled professionals and administrative class was lost to the country, leaving two doctors, one of whom was a psychiatrist dealing with an assortment of mental disorders and also administering to Macias (Baynham, 1980: p. 69).

On 3 August 1979, Lieutenant Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema launched an assault on the presidency from the Fernando Po prison island. After several days, Macias was captured and placed before trial by early September 1979 leading to his execution by the newly installed Revolutionary Military Council (RMC) (Liniger-Goumaz, 1989: p. 41, cited in Yates, 2017: p. 346). In the same month, September, Nguema declared himself president. The trial of a caged and suspended and finally execution of the former president, Macias was conducted as "theatre and a spectacle". In the words of Robert Williams, this was held in a public place with 1500 spectators in attendance while Macias was brought in a cage, suspended aloft from a ceiling and found guilty of committed to 101 death sentences and soon after executed by a firing squad drawn from the new Presidential Guards flown from Morocco (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 622).

In comments made soon after taking power, Obiang revealed that the new administration was particularly unimpressed by the manner that civilian political parties had managed the country's national affairs as:

...underlined by Lt.-Colonel would be permitted again. "For eleven years, the politicians had messed up everything", he told *El Pais* in an interview. "From now on, the military will oversee everything and will be at the head of the country... (Baynham, 1980: p. 70).

3. The Reign of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo: August 1979 to May 2020 and Beyond (?)

Macias was not one of my uncles, despite what people often imagine. In the Fang ethnicity, there exists a tradition of the ... large family "or tribe, like in most other African countries. Those who belong to it have affinity relations, great respect for one another, on many levels; but in reality, those whom one calls uncles" are most often distant cousins "who belong to the same tribe, but are not from the same family lineage." (Nguema, 2007).

We begin with President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's official biography in which he dismissed the blood line relationship with his predecessor, Francois Marcius Nguema, assumed by many to have been his maternal uncle. (Mario Esteban, 2009: p. 668). His subsequent style of governing did not differ much from Macias. Basing his power retention on a mix of absolute terror and determination to eliminate all opposition; concentrating public and institutional control amongst the Nguemas and clan members; creation and function one-party-state political party throughout the country and national social structures; the use of intelligence, the military and willing external actors, through establishing stilted diplomacy towards consolidating his rule; use of national resources exclusively towards the regime agenda.

Nguema II maintained an iron grip on power, forcing all opposition into exile, either in neighbouring states or in Spain with the most celebrated opposition becoming Severion Moto. In order to dissuade opposition, Obiang undertook secret operations, in agreement with governments where he would snatch or kidnap the opposition from exile such as in Benin, Cameroon, Gabon and even more recently, in South Sudan where they would stand trial and following confessions extracted under torture" would then be summarily executed. A discernible system of power retention soon emerged around Obiang Nguema's regime characterised by: Nguemaism or patronage; use of foreign soldiers and private military to guard the elite and their assets coupled with ruthless suppression of dissent (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 621; Klitgaard, 1990: pp. 19-21).

Just short of a year and half after taking power, residents in the capital city observed that:

"...fifteen months after the fall of Macias, the situation in Equatorial Guinea has hardly changed. Behind the wheels of new automobiles, you can of-

ten see the new leaders of the country who were old ones, that is to say, the same ones during the Macias era, and who, with rare exceptions, come from Mongomo, and belong to the clan which had dominated the country during the previous era.” (Liniger-Goumaz, 1989: p. 46).

In similar fashion with Macias, Obiang reconstituted a new presidential party, the Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial (PDGE) after which the party organises and wins almost one-party state multiparty elections only on paper (Campos-Serrano, 2013: p. 318). In 1991, Nguema allowed the country to adopt a new constitution that theoretically allowed, competitive, multiparty legislative elections.

However, the evidence for legislative elections held in 1999, 2004 and 2008; and the presidential polls in 1996, 2002 and 2009 revealed that the Election Commission announced results in which the Presidential party always won more than 95 per cent of the votes (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 622). As we shall see, the discovery of oil in the mid-1990s contributed to a new closure of the political possibilities (Campos-Serrano, 2013: p. 324).

Elaborate documentation of the serious human rights abuses continued as reported by the authoritative Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International as well as UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak who in January 2010 who had been provided special access and was able to examine the events from 1994 until 1999 as well as later to include the submission of the 2008 report:

“...found that torture [was] systematically used by the police forces against persons who refuse to ‘cooperate’—persons suspected of political crimes as well as suspects of common crimes” and noted that some prisoners suspected of political crimes were being held in solitary confinement for up to four years, almost always shackled at the legs (UNESCO, 2012: p. 4; Williams Jr., 2011: pp. 627-628).

As a signal of the abuses, the United States closed their embassy in Equatorial Guinea as part of its expressing dissent with Nguema’s governance model (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

4. Oil: Equatorial Guinea Politics and International Relations

Oil exploration had been conducted since 1985 by a joint Spanish and Equatorial state enterprise. This entity struck commercial quantities off-shore, parallel to the coast of Nigeria. In 1991 production commenced succeeding to draw in major players such as Exxon Mobile who made a major investment in opening the Zafiro Field bringing the country’s production to 190,000 barrels per day (bpd). Because the oil wells were off-shore, away from sporadic war fighting characteristic of the mainland and its geographic position to the United States (Eduardo Soto-Trillo 2013: pp. 36-38; Open Society, 2010). This was similar to Nigeria and Angola across the Atlantic and furthermore, the product was able to enter the US market almost uninterrupted, making Equatorial Guinea the third largest Sub Saharan producer supplying the US.

However, the management, exclusive benefit and continued as well as almost increased impoverishment of the 1.2 million ordinary Equatoriaguinians of whom are severely 76% poor soon revealed that this was a curse rather than a national windfall (Williams Jr., 2011: pp. 629-631).

After the discovery of massive oil reserves, the political dynamics changed with Nguema finding common cause with foreign multinationals while continuing to fend off military coup d'état after military coup d'état attempts (Mario Esteban, 2009: pp. 667-673; Robert E. Williams Jr., 2011: pp. 620-648). The most celebrated was the decision taken by President George Bush soon after 9/11 bombings of the twin towers where he decided to hedge oil supplies away from the Middle East. In that regard, Equatorial Guinea oil was in demand.

In 2002, Bush and Obiang met for breakfast, although the White House refused to release photographs of the meeting. In 2003, the U.S. embassy in Malabo was reopened. Three years later, on 12 April 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice received President Obiang in Washington and said, "You are a good friend and we welcome you." (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 634)

In this seeming political deregulation environment in which the international community for its own interests, was prepared to look the other side on the human rights record of Obiang Nguema, this was followed by the spawning of a culture of corruption where monies were laundered between oil companies and the Obiang Nguema dynastic network. The most celebrated was the Riggs Bank in which US\$700 million was later discovered by the US system (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 631; Open Society, 2010; O'Brien, 2004). In the same bank where embassy officials arrived with suitcases of cash, deposits were made in the names and companies associated with the Nguemas as well as in the names of high-ranking officials, with the necessary cooperation of the companies (US Senate, 2004; Global Witness, 2004). Since then, more oil rents are accounted for in the national budget (Campos-Serrano, 2013: p. 325; Esteban, 2009: pp. 672-675).

Finally, in President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, he has been able to fend off several coups as conceptually argued above by both Baynham and Williams. The most celebrated of these being the 2004 "Wonga" coup in which the political opposition appeared to have conspired with the international actors in launching the conspiracy led by Simon Mann and depicted in his book with Frederick Forsyth, *Dogs of War* (Williams Jr., 2011: p. 622). In the well-publicized event, the former Special Air Services (SAS) Officer flew into Harare from South Africa with a full plane of mercenaries planning to collect weapons on their way to Equatorial Guinea where they were then arrested (Al-jazeera News, 2018). Later in 2008, Simon was secretly and hurriedly extradited to Equatorial Guinea on the eve of a court injunction where he stood trial and was sentenced to 34 years (Andrew Malone, 3 November 2009). Two years later, on what Obiang explained was because he had provided a full confession of the plot and health grounds, he was paroled (Andrew Malone, 3 November 2009). In spite of this, attempts have continued with yet another reported event in 2018 (Al-jazeera

News, 2018).

But what sort of state has the long reigning Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo created since 1979? Alicia Campos-Serrano argues that:

Equatorial Guinea is not as a political entity whose autonomy is weakened by local misbehaviour or foreign exploitation ... is a space configured precisely by certain transnational connections that cross its territories ... rentier and the “scramble” perspectives tend to stress one of the two sides of this relationship, reinforcing outsider-insider, local and foreign analytical dichotomies (Alicia Campos-Serrano, 2013: pp. 314-317).

In other words, since Obiang Nguema accession to power, his tenure has not contributed to state formation but created a framework where the political elite are protected by foreign troops against local nationals while retaining exclusive access and distribution of the proceeds of the political economy of the country located in the oil and timber extraction and export (Cape Times, 2006; Robert E. Williams Jr., 2011: pp. 620-648). As we have tried to argue, Teodoro Obiang Nguema overthrew and executed his clan uncle, Macias Nguema only to restore the Mogomo-Fang in power, reinforcing and consolidating the patronage and familial networks (Open Society, 2010).

5. “Ruling beyond the Grave”—Anointing and Appointing “Teodorin Obiang Nguema” and the Future

In the final discussion, as our opening stanza indicated, dynasties are sometimes unlikely to survive beyond three generations. In the case of Equatorial Guinea, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo is 78 years old and is reportedly now suffering from prostate cancer. Aware of the human frailties, even amongst the Nguemas surrounding the presidency, he has begun to position his son, the 52 year-old Teodoro (aka Teodorin) Obiang Nguema as the anointed and constitutionally mandated successor. While ‘Teodorin’ is the Minister of Defence and Internal Security in charge of the gendarmerie amongst other posts, in 2012, he was appointed Vice President and in November 2016 further elevated to First Vice President firmly placing him in line for almost automatic accession if anything happens to the president.

However, in true reflection of the renowned Arab scholar, Ibn Khaldoun has reminded us from his understanding of the entry, survival and decline of dynasties confined to just three generations. In providing the sequence, Ibn Khaldoun argues:

“The first generation who found the dynasty keep in mind the difficulties they overcame ... and continues to do whatever ... to maintain (power). These founders are sharp and greatly feared, so people submitted to them. Then the second generation listen to their fathers explain how power was first acquired. Living in luxury and tranquillity, these sons lose many of the virtues of their fathers; but not all, because of their personal contact with them. Yet their understanding from listening is inferior to that from per-

sonal experience. Corrupted by luxury...they live in hope that the conditions that existed in the first generation may come back, or they live under the illusion that those conditions still exist” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967: p. 137).

“The third generation is content with ignorantly imitating their predecessors, dispensing with their ways and wasting the qualities and virtues which make creation and maintenance of dynastic power possible. They forget that greatness and glory are attributes earned with hardship and difficulties, and assume that these attributes were always with them due to their lineage. Over the course of three generations a dynasty goes ... senile” and gets worn out. (Ibn Khaldun, 1976: p. 137; Yates, 2017: p. 356)

“Teodorin” has developed a reputation of squandering public monies in ostentatious luxurious life styles in the United States, France, Switzerland, Spain and South Africa amongst others where he has acquired lavish homes, expensive sport cars ranging from Ferraris, luxury boats, airplanes (O’Brien, 2004). Most recently, in February 2020, a French Court found him guilty of embezzlement and abuse of public monies and fined him 30 million euros while confiscating his assets that included Mansions on the popular Foch Ave in Paris. On 17 September 2018, he landed in Brazil in a private jet not on official business with an entourage when customs officials seized 35 personally engraved watches worth \$30 million and \$1.5 million in cash. With international court action launched by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) including Transparency International (TI) successful court verdicts against Teodorin have been secured in Switzerland, Spain and France where millions have been confiscated and donated back to the country’s poor. The United States’ State Department had taken the lead, auctioning the mansion in Malibu and other assets and securing his signature to donate \$30 million to his compatriots. In a significant African case, while appearing in the Cape Town High Court, “Teodorin” argued that, as Minister of Forestry and Agriculture earning a standard \$5000 monthly salary, however, as a result of such joint ventures, was allowed by the state to work with foreign companies, he and other officials could receive “a percentage of the total cost of the contract.” The listed assets included:

...Teodoro Obiang owns the estate in Malibu, two large homes in Cape Town, South Africa, and a number of expensive cars, including seven Ferraris, two Lamborghinis, two Maybachs, five Bentleys, two Porsches, and four Rolls Royces.⁷⁶ With other family members possessing similar portfolios... (Williams Jr., 2011: pp. 631-632)

In a sense, the appointments that “Teodorin” has received have also been designed to protect him by providing diplomatic immunity and prevent his arrest. In the Brazilian incident, everyone on the entourage was strip searched while only “Teodorin” enjoyed diplomatic immunity and sat in a car throughout the ordeal. Furthermore, in all these incidents of squandered national resources, “Teodorin” has not publicly apologised or even seen to be attempting to change

his ways. The current collapse floor price of oil during coronavirus pandemic publicly known as COVID-19 since its outbreak in the city of Wuhan during December 2019 in China has bankrupted oil producing African states including Algeria, Angola, Gabon, Ghana, Senegal and Equatorial Guinea (Esteban, 2009: pp. 667-685). This development of an oil glut may in fact accelerate the departure of the second generation of the Nguemas in Equatorial Guinea and hasten the entry of the seemingly unprepared venal and third generation.

It has often been noted that tyrants are like those who ride on the backs of tigers; they must keep riding or be eaten. President Obiang is the product of an era in sub-Saharan African politics in which political leadership was an extraordinarily hazardous vocation. According to a survey by John Wiseman of the fates of 485 political leaders from 1960 to 1992, the chances of an African political leader being executed, imprisoned, or exiled during the period were three in five. To be more specific, 17.7 percent were executed, assassinated, or died in prison and 41.6 percent were imprisoned, exiled, or both (Williams Jr., 2011: pp. 634-635).

The most recent example of African icons shrivelling in their old age was witnessed in Zimbabwe after President Robert Mugabe, in power for nearly 38 years, in November 2017 was forced out of power during his 90s and his body charred with an all-consuming cancer. Summarily dismissed from power, Mugabe became a recluse, unable to accept or fully appreciate how he had outlived his usefulness to the power centres and even in death, petulantly refused for his remains to be interred at the prestigious country's national hero's acre.

"Teodorin" has also not shown any remorse towards the millions wasted and the embarrassment he has earned his father, the country and other citizens (Eduardo Soto-Trillo, 2013: pp. 36-38). Occasionally he appears to regard with disdain the ordinary Equatoriaguinians as he has become acquainted with "other royalty" in international circles. To then imagine such as a future leader to be accepted by the nation is to ignore the underlying anger, frustration and humiliation that has continued to build up during his father's term. Given the fact that opposition activists have continued to work with anti-corruption bodies, in the event that "Teodorin" comes to office, his integrity and reputation would be contested if not in the international courts but also within the legal system of Equatorial Guinea. "Teodorin" in has not attempted to ingratiate himself with the downtrodden and the ordinary citizenry, viewing most as serfs at the beck and call of the immense power and influence of his father on whose coat tails he has simply taken short rides whilst in the country but spending much of his time overseas until hounded and shamed by European civil society organisations that are able to bring him to the courts. Furthermore, the corporates and governments able and willing to flaunt human rights issues along the lines we noted by President George Bush and Condoleezza Rice have increasingly retreated and would not be willing to be seen in association with a someone of his tarnished image. Consequently, if President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasago is to depart from

the scene then Equatorial Guinea may be reduced into conflict over leadership crisis and contestation. Of course, whoever takes over may also act in the same manner as his father, “who carried out a much anticipated coup” in 1979 with the assistance of Spanish intelligence and other political opposition players.

6. Conclusion

As we begin to anticipate the departure of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo from office due to advanced age and failing health, the search for successor leadership is already in the minds of stakeholders in Equatorial Guinea. Meanwhile, Ibn Khaldoun’s prediction is being tested by the practical events in Equatorial Guinea in which the first leader, Francois Macias Nguema was in the trenches against the Spanish and other local nationalists in order to secure power only to squander this during his eleven years in power exposing himself to the rise of his “nephew” Teodoro Obiang Nguema. For both their valiant efforts towards maintaining Nguemaism, promoting the clan interests of a small elite protected by foreign troops against the majority of citizens and later able to benefit from the windfall of stupendous oil wealth, that vision of perpetual living in comfort may come to nought at the hands of the youthful “Teodorin” who may feel inclined to seek safety in exile rather than continue to exact fear and repression in order to thwart and sustain the regime interests. For over 52 years since independence in October 1968, a single family has been in power without change.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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