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EXTRACTION OFFSHORE, POLITICS INSHORE AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

*Alicia Campos Serrano*¹

ABSTRACT

Recent economic and socio-political dynamics in the territories that form Equatorial Guinea are related, in different ways, to the extraction of hydrocarbons from its Exclusive Economic Zone since the mid-1990s. These transformations are strongly mediated by specific social groups, especially the family who has occupied the government since 1968 and transnational oil companies, whose relationships are central to the exclusive political configuration in the country. This article analyzes this particular form of extraversion of power, as part of a broader history of the region, in which the role of the state's sovereignty as articulated during decolonization, will prove to be instrumental in the allocation of rights and the political economy of oil today. It will also attend to the spaces that the new political economy of oil has opened for alternative transnational connections around the country.

INTRODUCTION

In the various territories that constitute the state of Equatorial Guinea, people have been experiencing transformations in their lives, related, in one sense or another, to the extraction of oil and gas from the sea since the mid-1990s. The country has become the destination for hundreds of companies and thousands of immigrants from near and far away. The construction of roads, large infrastructures, or quarters has created new social geographies, while cities have grown enormously at the expense of the abandonment of rural habitats. However, other things continue: the maintenance of President Obiang Nguema in government, the military and police presence in checkpoints all along the roads, or the strikingly low levels of public services, such as health and education.

In recent academic literature, two different approaches attempt to shed light on the relationship between the extraction of mineral and other natural resources, and the economic and political configuration of productive countries. The first one is developed around concepts such as *rentier state* and *resource curse*. (Mahdavi 1970, Auty 1993, Karl 1997, Ross 2001) and insists on the trend of enduring authoritarian political

¹ Research Fellow 'Ramón y Cajal', Dept. Political Science and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain), alicia.campos@uam.es.

systems and economic stagnation in countries dependent on the production and export of natural resources, via *rentier* and neo-patrimonial mechanisms.ⁱ The second approach, stemming from neo-colonialism and dependency schools, uses ideas such as *new scramble for Africa*, (Bond 2006, Southall and Melber 2009) and highlights the role of international political economy and the interests of foreign companies and governments in the shaping of countries rich in natural resources.ⁱⁱ What they seem to share is the idea that, in these dynamics, there is a distortion of the allegedly normal ‘national economy’ and of the functioning of a sovereign state.

Our analysis considers Equatorial Guinea, not as a political entity whose autonomy is weakened by local misbehaviour or foreign exploitation, but as a space configured precisely by certain transnational connections that cross its territories, and specially the late association between local government and transnational economic groups. The *rentier* and the *scramble* perspectives tend to stress one of the two sides of this relationship, reinforcing outsider-insider, local-foreign analytical dichotomies. But only by reconsidering those dichotomies, and attending to the specific interactions of actors coming from distant places, it is possible to conceptualize more clearly the nature of the Nguema family’s predatory despotism. All this is not dissolving the institution of the state: rather the international principle of sovereignty will prove to be central in the political economy of oil extraction.

Guided by some residents in the country, in section 1, we will take notice of some of the major social changes that are taking place in the era of oil. The text situates those processes in the broad historical trajectory of these territories, marked by intense trans-regional and transoceanic connections. The logics of extraversion prompted by these connections have been strongly mediated, since decolonization in 1968, by the family who managed to occupy the government in those days (section 2). After the discovery of oil, transnational companies and numerous governments have become fundamental partners of the Nguema clan. These interactions have intensified the main logics of political domination since colonial times, such as repression and selective inclusion, which in turn is shaping the specific forms in which socialization of natural resources is occurring (section 3). However, relationships between government and economic groups are not the only ones that cross Equatorial Guinea: other actors have also looked to create their own networks and extraverted dynamics, in spite of serious barriers (section 4).

This article is based on secondary sources, such as the extensive consultation of press and websites, the data offered by international governmental and non-governmental organizations on Equatorial Guinea, and the conduction of approximately fifty interviews in Equatorial Guinea and Madrid from June 2009 to July 2010 by a team of four researchers, including the author.ⁱⁱⁱ

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS ONSHORE

In his analysis on Angola and other extractive areas, J. Ferguson (2006) has pointed to the existence of extractive enclaves strongly connected to global networks in Africa, surrounded by large and highly isolated areas, where globalization is hardly felt by the populations. This situation in Equatorial Guinea fits with the economic geography depicted in his ‘Angolan model’, as oil extraction is developed entirely at sea, with small use of local workforce and other local resources. (Abaga 1999) However, recent social and political transformations in its lands, produced far from the offshore platforms, cannot be explained without reference to the political economy generated around them.

The small amount of data available concerning social indicators in Equatorial Guinea does indeed show a substantial continuity in social indicators, as if the oil boom had only affected macroeconomic indicators but not people’s current standard of living (CESR 2009).^{iv} What aggregated data cannot show is the differentiated ways in which individuals suffer the scarcity and degraded public services or enjoy the profits generated by the oil industry. If we attend to the US Senate report on the Riggs Bank in 2004,^v or the more recent cases against the President’s son for ill-gotten gains in France and US,^{vi} many of the benefits of the extractive industry are being accumulated far from the country, not only by the foreign companies but also by the individuals who occupy the government. (Frynas 2004, Harel 2006, McSherry 2006, Ghazvinian 2007, Shaxson 2007)

However, in recent years, some of the rents are being invested in the territory: one of the first impression any visitor has when arriving is that of a country under construction. Public works such as roads, airports, sport complexes, an even a luxury resort and a cathedral,^{vii} are developed along with private complex oil infrastructures and compounds, growing informal settlements, and entire new neighbourhoods such as so called ‘Malabo II’. (Ghazvinian 2007: 177–8, Williams 2011: 630) At the same time, some transnational NGOs have denounced that this building fever is justifying forced expropriations and evictions without fair compensation, as well as fostering the accumulation of land by few people. (AI 2009b, *Les Afrique* 2009, CPDS 2003–11)

The new precarious salary sector

Fieldwork in Equatorial Guinea is never easy when covering political dynamics: this is the reason why our interviews mostly focused on the personal economic changes that individuals had experienced in recent times. This allowed us to realize that one of the most direct implications of the new economic activities in the country is the increase in

the number of salaried workers. A young informant was one of the few but increasing amount of locals employed by oil companies,^{viii} who work in the platforms in a 28-day rotation system: yet for most of his workmates, coming from countries as far as the Philippines, six-month shifts are the norm. He obtained his job through one of the intermediary employment agencies that belong to some President's relative; as the rest of local oil workers we interviewed, he accused them of retaining great part of what companies say to pay, though he considered that "the only solution is resign oneself".^{ix} Only one of them, an engineer trained in Spain, mentioned how the American oil company had employed him directly, what seems to be a growing trend for highly skilled workers. He noted that "the norms that the company applies to local workers in terms of salary or promotion are less beneficial than those for the rest of employees". He also complained about the salary difference with engineers working at the Ministry of Mines, Industry and Energy, whose numbers have enormously increased in recent times.^x

We also met people in services related to the oil sector. A local and well-known lawyer stated how his revenue had increased exponentially since he had become the attorney of choice for several oil companies in their growing engagement with the local judicial system. He was not however too complacent about the judiciary and the general situation, as a usual lawyer of political opposers he considered that "being fair in Equatorial Guinea is a bit problematic". There are also numerous security guards working for the company that single-handedly monopolizes security in most oil compounds, *Sociedad Nacional de Vigilancia* (SONAVI) owned by the President's brother,^{xi} but we did not manage to interview any. Nevertheless, the business plan of an interviewee to grow vegetables for the compounds faced the fact that oil companies bring most of their food from abroad.

Finding workers in the growing construction sector was much easier. A 33-year-old man who had arrived to Malabo from the continental part of the country some years ago, worked in a building company of Arab capital (most of the companies that employ locals seem to be from Arab countries and Cameroon, as Chinese companies usually bring their own workers). He complained about salary and treatment differences with foreign, mostly African or Arab, workers, as much as the absence of unemployment, sickness, or accident benefits. "But if you dare to claim for better working conditions" before the company or any official instance "you risk getting kicked out". In a more traditional salaried sector, education, two teachers in Malabo who had studied in the national university (UNGE) explained that, despite the increase in the salaries during the last decade and in spite of their wives being also employed, they were forced to work in more than one school in order to obtain a full salary.

Our fieldwork also involved discussions about whether there currently is a nascent middle class in Equatorial Guinea. Some interviewees described the emergence of a new social group of individuals in their thirties and forties, who have studied abroad (mainly Spain), and have well-paid jobs in the foreign companies, which enable new patterns of consumption and residence. A 42 year-old woman, with whom we shared a Barcelona-Malabo flight and who happened to work in the social-responsibility unit of a big oil company, emphasized the efforts of this native middle class to maintain a low political profile. Such a comfortable political stance, however, is a luxury that those in managerial jobs could not afford. For them, as she bluntly put it, ‘either you use the party card, or you are fired’: she was referring to the President *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE).^{xii}

Others, like a lawyer in Malabo involved with a political party, argued this “connivance” and lack of minimum autonomy from the government militates against the very idea of a native middle class. And for an unemployed woman in her 30s “it is unthinkable that in Guinea there is any rich person outside the President family”. The need of personal contacts with somebody in government does not seem to be exclusive, however, of the most rewarding jobs. A worker in a foreign building company admitted that he was hired after the last legislative elections in 2008, when he not only carried out the PDGE’s instructions for taxi drivers to distribute the party’s leaflets, but also took a subordinate part in an organized fraud at polling stations (controlling the ballots of voters and throwing away those ballots of supposed opposition sympathizers).

As we could appreciate, most salaried jobs in the administration, the hydrocarbons, or the construction sector usually take quite a precarious character, with periods of unemployment combined with more informal and deregulated activities. Another common pattern was the spending of most of the salaries in basic goods and services such as food, housing and transportation, whose prices have multiplied from five to tenfold in the last ten years.^{xiii} Expenditure on health or education was justified by many of our interviewees with the need to avoid the low quality of state sponsored services.^{xiv} This is promoting a growing privatization: numerous private schools and hospitals have been created; there is a general use of small electric generators; the number of cars has enormously expanded; and the mobile company Hits Telecom has grown, notoriously exceeding the reach of the public landline company Getesa.^{xv} According to a taxi driver in the capital, many people use the taxi more often now than some years ago, although its use drastically decreases during the second part of the month, proving that most people have difficulty making ends meet. A general feeling about recent developments was the expressed by another worker in a Moroccan building company: “if builders are hungry that means that things have not essentially changed”.

Women, foreigners and political dissidents: opportunities and exclusions

Women seem to be almost excluded from construction, oil, or transport jobs, except as cleaning, administrative and, in some exceptional cases, management personnel. They find more work possibilities in hostelry and *bayamsel* (retail trade), a sector they share with shops run by Lebanese, Chinese, Malian or Spanish diasporas. We found various restaurants and bars set up by women, one lady in Bata, who had come back from Spain with a son, some savings, and after years of training. She seemed surprised by the quick success of her business thanks to “the new affluent people”, though she also complained about periodic power cuts that badly affected her big freezers (“there is no point in talking about electricity in Bata”), erratic market supplies, excessive tax payments and difficulties in finding well-trained staff. In the same sector, but in a more subordinate position, there was a young woman also in Bata who supported two children, and some of her siblings. She worked ten hours a day in a restaurant run by Chinese citizens “with good relations with important people in the government”, where she lacked any job security and had to comply with sexual demands from clients.

We also found women in the markets, whom continue to dominate the traditional small trade in food or cloths. From informal conversations with them, we learnt that these activities have grown in recent times, in a context of greater autonomy from men. The origin of their merchandises was another recent change, as most of them now come from neighbouring countries. In fact, cross-border trade and smuggling in the frontiers with Gabon and especially Cameroon has boomed, and food has recently exceeded textiles and small machinery in importance. (Roitman and Roso 2001: 125–6, Frynas 2004: 540). In turn, the feminized subsistence agriculture, (Campos and Micó 2006: 66–68) which persists as a supplementary activity for the families, is not enough to satisfy urban demands, whereas the already-vanishing cocoa production in Bioko Island has halved since the beginning of the 1990s. (Urrea et al. 1999; Roitman and Roso 2001: 125; BEAC 2010)

In the food sector we met a couple in their fifties, living in a Malabo neighbourhood near the beach. He went fishing in a rented motorboat with three other fishermen, whereas she sold the fish, fresh or frozen, in the market town or the restaurants. From them we knew of the existence of police and military *barreras* (patrols) in the sea that perform a similar function to road checkpoints, blocking access to certain security areas, and extorting fishermen in order to obtain a share of their catch. Increased patrolling as a response to some armed incursions from the Niger Delta in recent times has meant, according to them, that fewer artisanal fishermen dare to go to sea. He himself would change this activity “for a job in a company”, “because I do not like to live always afraid”.

As we have already noted, new business and job opportunities, both formal and informal, are stimulating the arrival of more and more people to urban centres,

especially Malabo and Bata. Some of the new city-dwellers come from the rural areas, or they are returning former emigrants to Spain, Cameroon, or Gabon: one of the members of our research team, who had lived in Madrid for ten years, falls within this category. Many others are from nearby regions (especially Cameroon) and West African countries, in addition to China, United States, Arab Countries, and Latin America.^{xvi} The country is also attracting criminal networks that traffic children and women for domestic and sexual exploitation. (US Department of State 2011)

A 37 year-old Cameroonian, who made a living as a self-employed bricklayer in Bata, claimed to have numerous local friends, and to live with a Guinean woman, but was aware of the “suspicions and rejection” they provoke among the rest of the population. In spite of suffering the worst stereotypes (“Cameroonians are always into bad things”, as one of our national interviewees put it), they are amongst the best integrated in local society. West Africans constitute closer-knit groups, this was made clear in our conversation with a Malian trader who sold clothing and electronics from a shop he owned with some relatives. He underscored the importance of finding a Malian spouse, and informed on Malian plans to build a Mosque next to Malabo’s Central Market, which also proves the growing stabilization of these immigrants in the country.

All the immigrants interviewed deplored the assaults, detentions, mistreatments, and theft that they suffer periodically at the hands of the police. Human right reports also denounce how African immigrants suffer periodic roundups, the confiscation of their savings, and periodic expulsions from the country through the Cameroonian border. (OHCHR 2007) Harassments and expulsions have been especially ferocious after the military incursions from abroad, such as the 2004 mercenary plot and the attacks from the Niger Delta in 2007 and 2009, but also on the eve of AU Summit celebrated in Malabo in June 2011.^{xvii}

However, the differentiated effects of the new political economy also apply to newcomers.^{xviii} Americans and other oil workers who stay in the offshore platforms and gated compounds at the outskirts of Malabo and Bata live fended off the repressive methods of local security forces. Instead, they are subject to company regulations and international oil rules. In her work based on fieldwork in the compounds, H. C. Appel has shown the company’s’ effort ‘to disentangle the production of profit from the place in which it happens’, through the maintenance of comfortable Huston-like quarters, separated by walls and control gates from the local population. (Appel 2012: 4). On the contrary, Chinese tend to live in the native towns around their shops or the building companies in which they work, but they maintain quite a limited interaction with the rest of the population.^{xix} (Esteban, 2010)

Apart from African immigrants, another group especially vulnerable to harassment is that of individuals affiliated with political parties opposed to the government.

Employment has increased its value as an instrument against dissidence, as opposition leaders and even their families are excluded from the salaried sector, through mechanisms such as the requirement of PDGE membership by employment agencies (Frynas 2004: 541; Campos and Micó 2006: 34, 59, 63). These people have little choice but to try to run their own enterprises and to gain a modicum of economic autonomy from the government: a transport company, a brick factory, a pharmacy, a clinic, a school, or a bar were some of the business run by activists of *Convergencia Para la Democracia Social* (CPDS) interviewed. As numerous examples show, this autonomy is always under threat. The owner of the pharmacy in Malabo, a former CPDS candidate for president, agreed to join the government ranks in January 2011. One of our interviewees, a gynaecologist and CPDS executive commission member, was imprisoned for four months in February 2012: since then, his clinic has been closed.

The extraction of offshore hydrocarbon reserves has therefore meant changes in the economy and daily life in Equatorial Guinea. The different ways in which people are experiencing all these transformations greatly depend on the direct or indirect personal relations they maintain with those who have occupied the government since the end of colonialism. Therefore how this particular political economy of oil has been constructed can only be understood in the broader historical context of the insertion of these territories in the world economy.

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES AROUND BIKO ISLAND

The Gulf of Guinea has been crisscrossed throughout its history by trans-boundary and transoceanic connections, whose character, of more enclave or ‘thick’ nature, has suffered intense variations. The recent integration of Equatorial Guinea into the worldwide oil market is but one episode of a broader history of this African region.

When Britons established a small town at the North of Bioko Island, Clarence city, as a key location in their fight against slave trade, it had been a long time since several waves of people from neighbouring regions had arrived and peopled it. (Vansina 1990, Molino 1993) Since the 16th century, ships from Europe en route to Asia or America had passed nearby and anchored to stock up. During the time of ‘legitimate’ commerce, palm oil became the main commercial staple. Timber and palm oil were collected by freed slaves and native Bubi inhabitants, and marketed by British companies established at Clarence city. With the end of British rule in 1843, the Creole elite of western African origin, known as *Fernandinos*, inherited the control of the trade. (Sundiata 1996)

Cocoa plantations blossomed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, during the

expansion of Spanish colonial occupation in the island that started in 1858, and were dominated by medium landowners, Fernandinos and Spaniards. (Sundiata 1996) Fierce military resistance first, and colonial arrangements after total conquest of the island afterwards, limited the use of natives as cheap labour. The shortage of manpower in the cocoa plantations would become endemic, and was partially met with the importation of people from western Africa. There, gradual abolition of the slave trade had created a certain social class with an undefined personal status, ready available to work as cheap farm workers in various degrees of 'paid temporary servitude'. (Clavero 2006: 439, García Cantús 2006)

The European colonial partition of Africa at the end of 19th century led to the demarcation of the British, French, German, and Spanish colonies, adding the small continental territory of Río Muni to Spanish Bioko and other small islands.^{xx} It was only in the first decades of the 20th century that military control was imposed over the entire main island (1900s), as well as the continental part (1920s). Until the end of Spanish government, the export of cocoa from Bioko, as well as coffee and timber from Río Muni, to the protected markets in the metropolis, were the main economic connections between the territories and the world economy. The old local elite, gathered at the city councils and at the agrarian chambers of Santa Isabel (old Clarence city) and Bata in Río Muni, shared their role as economic intermediaries with the companies that increasingly arrived from Spain. (Sant Gisbert 2009)

The Spanish colonial order underwent numerous transformations, from a narrow presence in the capital and cocoa plantations, to a wider integration of the whole population in the economic and governmental structure of the colony. (Castro and Ndongo 1998, Díaz Matarranz 2005, Nerín 2010) The specific forms that this integration assumed went from initial compulsory labour of Africans in plantations, infrastructures and public works, to their participation in the growing of commercial crops as small-size farmers. (Sanz Casas 1983) Colonial law reacted to this unplanned social and economic process by transforming the colonized into 'indigenous people', in order to control and to limit their participation in the economic and public spaces of the colony: the strong juridical dichotomy between *indígenas* and *uropeos* was only tempered by the category of *emancipados*.^{xxi} (Mamdani 1996, Campos 2005)

Independence from Spain in 1968 meant the formal end of these colonial differentiations, and the emergence of new ones, based on the principles of sovereignty and nationality. (Campos 2003) The new institutional situation justified the removal of advantageous conditions for Guinean products by the Spanish government, which converted them into aid programs, and the production of cocoa and coffee almost disappeared. (Abaga 1997) People also moved due to the new situation: Spanish

colonists and Nigerian workers left the country, and emigration for economic or political reasons, to neighbouring countries and Spain, became a common strategy.

Since independence, the relations of the territories and the people who stayed with world politics and economy were mainly based on the flow of aid from Spain and the Eastern Block to the state government, and from other Western governments since Obiang's coup in 1979. Along with the public Administration, aid became the principle source of salaried jobs in the country. (Ridao 2000) During the eighties, some transnational commercial transactions blossomed, turning high-ranking officials into fundamental intermediaries: tropical timber was extracted by Asian companies well connected to the President's son at the Ministry of Forestry; and cocaine was carried from Latin America to Africa, Europe or the United States in diplomatic bags. (Fegley 1989; ODG 1994, Wood, 2004) This justified the description of the country as a 'criminal state' by some authors. (Bayart et al. 1999: 26. See also Klitgaard 1991)

From palm oil to timber, the island of Bioko and the nearby continental territories have been the location for the production or extraction (and sometimes only the passage) of products that were transformed, used, and consumed in faraway places. People and their labour have also moved, forcibly or voluntarily, through this area, covering varying distances to work in plantations, timber yards, and also to flee political persecution. These cross-border connections that link distant lands have, over time, contributed to configure the various social and political local orders, which have often been marked by exclusion and despotism: since the initial colonial presence in Bioko in the 19th century, followed by the heavier and more intrusive colonialism under Franco, and the terror regime of the first government following independence, to the dictatorship of Teodoro Obiang Nguema. (Ndongo 1977, García Domínguez 1977, Fegley 1989, Liniger Goumaz 1988 and 1996, Sundiata 1990) The material and symbolic resources from abroad have helped an elite minority to overcome the difficulties of accumulation of power in the African tropical forest, and to maintain their supremacy over the rest of the inhabitants, in a dynamic designated as extraversion of power by J. F. Bayart (2000).

But the international arena has also played a role in moments of change and liberation. This was the case during the end of colonial order, which was obtained thanks to a skilful use by Guinean nationalists of international dynamics and institutions, such as the Afro-asiatic movement and the Special Committee of 24 of United Nations. By 1960, colonialism was considered contrary to International Law by the UN General Assembly (resolution 1514), and the maintenance of pressures from abroad forced a negotiated transfer of power and a unified independence between the two main parts of the territory, resulting into the single state of Equatorial Guinea in 1968. (Ela 1983, Campos 2003) After independence, though, international institutions provided more

support to those in government than to dissidents, as the principle of sovereignty and its corollary of non-intervention as articulated in the UN and the Organization of African Union, were usually waved against any menace to their rule. Until the 1990s, these menaces mostly came from the military, which led periodic uprisings and therefore suffered the worst repression.

The end of the Cold War facilitated, once more, a moment of political openness: the new dynamics in Africa, and elsewhere, and the conditions attached to aid by Western donors were quite influential in the constitutional reforms and the articulation and recognition of political parties in the country. In 1991, a new constitution established a multiparty system with periodic elections for the legislative assembly, the presidency, and the town councils. Up to thirteen political parties besides the PDGE, were recognized.

The Nguemas in government soon learned how to manipulate elections and their results, how to crack down the newly legalized opposition, and how to intimidate citizens into refraining from participating in political activities. International donors, especially Spanish and American governments, replied by halting support of the political transition, and this encouraged the organization and celebration of ‘freer and fairer’ local elections in September 1995. The opposition proposed a joint list, the *Plataforma de Oposición Conjunta* (POC), which won 19 out of 27 town councils, though ultimately the government only recognized nine of them. (Abaga 1997, Escribano 1999)

These new dynamics, however, did not continue in subsequent elections: legislatives in 1999, 2004, and 2008, local in 2000, 2004, and 2008 and presidential in 1996, 2002, and 2009. The fraud that allows the President’s party to always claim more than 95% of the votes only received mild condemnation from donors and international organizations. As we will see, the discovery of oil in the mid-1990s contributed to the new closure of the political possibilities.

EXTRACTIVE EXTRAVERSION AND POLITICAL DOMINATION

The maintenance of the Nguema clan in government since independence, and the authoritarian forms they preside over, represents, therefore, a major continuity in the political trajectory of the country. In present times, political and social predominance of those in government has deepened: our interviews have already shown how personal relations with officials or some of their relatives are crucial to take advantage of opportunities brought by foreign investments. Now we will see how this ‘internal’ predominance is based on the exclusive relations that the government maintains with transnational companies and other far-away actors. Only considering Equatorial Guinea

as a political space conformed by the transboundary activities of different groups, and their specific connections and ‘frictions’ (Tsing 2004), will it be possible to understand the specific forms that political domination adopts.

In 2008, production within the Exclusive Economic Zone recognized to Equatorial Guinea reached 488 thousand Barrels of Oil Equivalent per day, though it has slightly decreased since then. (IMF 2010a, EIA 2012) US based corporations Marathon, Exxon-Mobil, and Hess Corporations lead the oil and gas companies of different origins who extract the crude. (Asodegue 1996, OilWatch 2003, Frynas 2004: 529, Harel 2006: 163, EIA 2012)^{xxii} What characterize the activities of these transnational groups are the connections, legal as well as personal and informal, with the family that occupies the government. (Wood 2004, Soares de Oliveira 2007, Shaxson 2007) President Obiang Nguema and his relatives constitute, as they did before the discovery of oil, the main local intermediaries between foreign economic groups and the territory of the state.

Payments due to the state by oil and gas companies, according to the sharing contracts they sign, have mostly substituted and multiplied rents obtained from cocoa and wood commercialization, foreign aid, or drug trafficking.^{xxiii} Part of these rents end up deposited in foreign bank accounts in the name of high-ranking officials, with the necessary contribution of the companies, as evidenced in 2004, during the Riggs Bank scandal in the US. (US Senate 2004, Global Witness 2004) Since then, more oil rents are counted in the National Budget, and are officially deposited in the Bank of Central African States (BEAC).^{xxiv} But accumulation by the political elite in the context of resource extraction also takes place in other forms such as the control of national corporations, such as GEPetrol and Sonagas, that increasingly participate in joint ventures with oil and gas companies,^{xxv} or the foundation of companies that work as local partners of foreign investors in the construction or wood sector,^{xxvi} receiving ‘a percentage of the total cost of the contract’.^{xxvii} We already saw how members of the government also provide the local services and assets that oil companies need, such as local labour, security services, or soil. (Frynas 2004, Shaxson 2007)

One of the questions that arises here is why a mineral, under the sea, out of the reach and control of any government in the region, is extracted by far-away companies and at the same time becomes the main sustenance of the Nguema family. The answer must be found in part in the regulative dimension of many export-oriented industries: if the rules of *open trade* support the activities of private companies in the Gulf of Guinea, the importance of the Nguema clan for the industry is based on the conventions regarding *sovereignty*, as they develop especially during decolonization processes. Because of them, in most countries the state is the formal owner of the underground natural resources,^{xxviii} and the people in government, its legal representatives with capacity to negotiate on them. In the case of oil, only direct and legal relationships between

companies with internationally recognized governments can guarantee the huge investment needed in line with the rules and standards of international trade and the legislation of the company's country. (Reno 2001: 198–9, Soares de Oliveira 2007: 57–60)^{xxix}

The legal character of oil extraction, and the exponential growth of the benefits generated by it, has converted Equatorial Guinea into a more respectable and attractive state in the eyes of other governments.^{xxx} Relations between the US Administration and President Obiang have been facilitated by lobbies in Washington connected to the oil industry,^{xxxi} and have resulted in the reopening of the American Embassy in Malabo in 2004, closed since 1996. (Ghazvinian 2007, Maas 2009, Williams 2011)^{xxxii} Europeans have lost part of the influence they used to enjoy, although French presence is still strong in the telecom and petrol distribution sectors, and Spanish government continues to be the major bilateral donor, in a context in which aid is no longer the main resource of the state. (Ruiz Miguel 2004, Burke 2008, Government of Spain 2009) At the same time, President Obiang has sought to diversify his international counterparts, especially after the US Senate report and an attempted coup d'état from abroad both in 2004; and many governments, such as the Chinese, have been happy to reinforce their stance and economic possibilities in the country.^{xxxiii} The Moroccan monarchy is still a good ally of President Obiang, who frequently visits the country for medical and security reasons.^{xxxiv} And the increasing investments of Arab, Asian, European, or Brazilian companies in sectors such as construction or wood extraction, was preceded and accompanied by growing bilateral relations with other governments.

In the neighbouring region, Malabo has been able to expand its leverages among its peers: the withdrawal of the UN Human Rights Special Representative for Equatorial Guinea in 2002 was product of the African lobby at the international organization, and in 2011 President Obiang Nguema was appointed as new President of the African Union. As the most important contributor to the regional organizations, it has imposed certain changes in the Economic Community of Central African States (CEMAC) and the BEAC.^{xxxv} (Nso 2009) On the other hand, tensions are also evident with adjacent countries, especially around borders, (Dzurek 1999, Roitman and Roso 2001: 138–42, Soares de Oliveira 2007: 216–7)^{xxxvi}: in spite of integration rhetoric, sovereignty principle has also been strengthened here by oil economy as the main basis for regional politics.

The privileged position of the government in those various transnational scenarios is constitutive of the political order in the country. It is precisely the 'gatekeeper' role played by the state between international fora and markets, and the territory, (Cooper 2002: 156–90) which explains the domination their incumbents maintain over the population; and the particular form that this domination assumes. **On the one hand**, the

specific participation of the territory in the world economy so far described, which procures direct rents to the authorities, renders local taxpayers redundant in the maintenance of the state. In their strategy of extraversion, its occupants have few incentives to use oil revenues for the benefit of the majority or to permit the rise of autonomous economic groups: in this sense, the non-investment in social services is, in a way, an intended policy aimed to avoid the emergence of economic or political rivals.

On the other hand, exclusion is not the only mechanism of political domination of the Equatorial Guinean gatekeeper: cooptation of regional or ethnic agents and potential dissidents has always had a place in the political history of the territory. New economic opportunities as those observed in the first section have facilitated certain inclusive political strategies through economic clientelism that reach more people than before. In fact, the new construction fever responds in great part to this patronage politics. As B. Hibou (2006) points out in the case of Tunisia, these ‘pacts of security’ between government and population are quite unequal and do not embrace all the population, but it helps to explain the continuity of the regime. In the case of Equatorial Guinea, this pact is increasingly channelled through labour relations: the capacity to determine those who have access to the new wealth has reinforced the network of supporters and clients that, beginning with President Obiang himself, traverse the country.

Officials in the administration of the state, all (mostly male) members of the PDGE, play an important part in this network, functioning as a virtual second circle around the President’s clan. Their designation adopts a certain criteria of territorial representation, making them personally responsible for the distribution of the profit they obtain from their access to the state –and therefore for the poverty– of their district of origin. (Nzang Okenve 2009) These dynamics in such a tiny territory allow for a very personalized, almost ‘familial’, political control of the population, and for the development of certain strategy of discharge of political control and responsibility (Diouf 1999, Hibou 2000).

Clientelist inclusion is not incompatible with repression and the fear it provokes. We have already noticed the numerous checkpoints all along the country roads, where police and army control the permanent traffic of persons and goods. Security and para-security groups regularly act in violation of human rights (US Department of State 2003–2010, CPDS 2003–2011, OHCHR 2008, HRW 2009, Williams 2011). And accusations of participating in real or imaginary coups d’état justify periodical harassment and military trials against political dissidents, in which torture, death in custody, and sentences to death are common.^{xxxvii} Avoiding consolidation of any alternative group, which may occupy the gatekeeper position, becomes a paramount aim of those in power.

In this context, the uninterrupted celebration of elections, despite their uselessness as a means to change government, or the tolerance of certain activity by starving opposition

parties, (Sant Gisbert 2008) can be explained in part by the theatrical role they play in the presentability of the country in international fora. Elections and referendums also serve the government internally, as moments of dramatizing its power vis-à-vis the weaknesses of opposition.^{xxxviii} The recent constitutional reforms, which have been passed after a referendum on November 13 2011,^{xxxix} take part of the same logic, having been promoted by the President in the context of the Arab revolts this year. Far from opening the political arena, he has taken advantage of the situation to reinforce his clan's power,^{xl} and to neutralize and fragment even more the political parties (UP 2011a, CPDS 2011b).

Many of these dynamics stop short of the oil platforms and compounds. Here, social control is carried out not only through disciplining devices designed for efficient productivity, but also through the disentanglement of non-local workers from the local environment and the denying of political responsibility by the part of the companies (Appel, 2012).^{xli} Oil extraction is thus generating two political spaces, one centred on arbitrariness and unequal inclusion in which bureaucratic capabilities are weak against the strength of patronage networks, (Reno 2011); and another centred on productivity, in which oil companies preside over a disciplined work force. The existence of both spaces are, however, articulated, permitting oil companies to get rid of trade unions and social tasks, and the government to obtain easy rents and to develop other kind of discharge through oil managers.

The political and social process associated with the discovery of oil by American companies in the nearby sea, has therefore reinforced the extraversion of power in the country and old dynamics of political domination associated with it. It has also prompted new forms of discharge, as in oil platforms and compounds, where transnational companies preside over a separated social order directed toward productive processes. Whereas these spaces must be understood as articulated to the power logics in the rest of the territory, other processes to which we now turn may expose and even question them.

ALTERNATIVE NETWORKS AROUND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

In his work on the Niger Delta, Cyril Obi (2006) shows how the alliance between the government and transnational companies is mirrored by alternative connections that link other actors, inside and outside the country. In Equatorial Guinea, in spite of strong hindrances, dissident groups have historically created linkages with other social or political movements in distant spaces. Oil has brought as many limitations as new opportunities for alternative connections; if local groups and organizations have been undermined by the dynamics of coercion and cooptation, the new relevance of the

territory as energy producer has stimulated the interest of media and advocacy groups in places other than Spain, especially the United States.

Equato-Guinean parties that emerged during the constitutional reforms of the early 1990s sought support from other political and social groups. The origins of CPDS in a group of young students in Europe, and the adoption of a social democrat ideology, immediately facilitated their personal and institutional connections in Spain and other countries, and its membership to the Socialist International. The *Movimiento Para la Autodeterminación de la Isla de Bioko* (MAIB), found supporters thanks to the use of the language of self-determination of indigenous people for the Bubi population. Its main counterpart, until its banishment after an attempted armed rising in 1998 and the subsequent repression, was the nationalist *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* in Spain.

The group with older transnational relations is probably the *Partido del Progreso de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PPGE): a member of the International Centre Democratic Party, it maintained intense relations with the Spanish conservative party, *Partido Popular*, until the latter came to power in 1996. Their historical leader, Severo Moto, has participated in other kinds of networks, such as the one that organized a coup d'état from Cabinda in 1997, forcing the PPGE illegalization, or the mercenary one in March 2004 (Ghazvinian 2007: 185–93, Shaxson 2007: 133–42). Moto currently presides over a self-proclaimed Government in Exile, based in Spain. The different branches of *Unión Popular* (UP) and *Alianza Popular de Guinea Ecuatorial* (APGE) have less successfully sought to establish relations with conservative parties. For its part, the origin of *Frente Demócrata Republicano* (FDR) in Mongomo District, real fief of the Nguema family, together with the ambiguity of its ideology, have made this party's relationships with external actors more difficult.

Oil has affected and diminished the possibilities of foreign support for the political parties in Equatorial Guinea: its traditional partners show now less determination to confront rich President Obiang. This was evidenced during the Arab revolts in Spring 2011, when CPDS and UP tried to mobilize the population without much echo in international forums.^{xlii} On the other hand, Obiang has augmented his capacity for harassment against political dissidents beyond Equatorial Guinea's borders, and in recent years, some exiles have been murdered or kidnapped and brought to Guinean jails before being judged, and in some cases even executed. (AI 2009a and 2010, HRW 2009: 70–2)^{xliii}

On the other hand, some people in the country have taken advantage of the law on Non-Governmental Organizations of 1999 and the European Union programs of 'civil society capacity building' to create local NGOs (EU 2008). Their autonomy from the patronage networks of the Nguema clan, however, as compromised as that of most of the political parties, and few of these associations may claim strong transnational

relations: the law itself limits the assistance of international organizations to local groups. (Wendorff 2008, Kraus 2011) On the other hand, more informal and personal forms of transnational communication have also emerged: during the 2000 decade, numerous internet websites, forums and blogs, usually in Spanish, have facilitated the encounters of many Equatorial-Guineans and other people in Africa, Europe, and other places, and have exhibited the situation of the country.^{xliv}

Despite these difficulties to create strong alternative transnational relations, the new oil country has attracted more attention from places other than Spain, and the agreements between government and oil companies have been under scrutiny by international NGOs, media and legislative bodies. After a report by a journalist from *Los Angeles Times*,^{xlv} and a detailed investigation by the British NGO Global Witness (2004), the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations published its report already mentioned, confirming the involvement of American oil companies in the diversion of high amounts of money to the personal assets of the local political elite.^{xlvi} (US Senate 2004)

Since then, transnational organizations, such as Global Witness, Human Rights Watch, Centre for Economic and Social Rights or Revenue Watch Institute, or the French CCFD-Terre Solidaire have joined Amnesty International or the Spanish *Asociación para la Solidaridad Democrática con Guinea Ecuatorial* (ASODEGUE) in the denunciation of the regime, either individually or in sporadic coalitions or campaigns.^{xlvii} The country has been worthy of an annual seminar organized by the Royal Institute of International Relations in UK, with the presence of academics, NGOs and oil companies. The growing social movements around the extraction of minerals, such as Publish What You Pay (PWYP), that have strongly resonated in Africa since mid-2000s, have offered new spaces where some individuals from political parties and NGOs in Equatorial Guinea periodically expose their denunciations.^{xlviii} In part as a result of these pressures, in 2010 Equatorial Guinea was discarded as a 'candidate member' in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), in spite of the efforts of American oil companies to support the government's permanence in this organization. (EITI 29 April 2010)

A campaign led by the NGO EG Justice tried to avoid the creation of a UNESCO Prize funded by and named after Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. (EG Justice 2012, HRW 2010) In 2010, a similar convergence of critics successfully denounced the intended incorporation of Equatorial Guinea into the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP).^{xlix} And at the same time, tribunals in places as distant as Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain), Paris (France) and Los Angeles (United States) have admitted, during the last three years, charges against high officials of Equatorial Guinea, for diversion of oil rents in those countries.¹

Not all the alternative transboundary relationships are so civic. The failed plot or coup d'état that involved a group of South African and Armenian mercenaries detained in Malabo and Harare in March 2004, made visible a network that seemed to have linked private security companies, exiled Severo Moto in Madrid, and business men such as Lebanese Ely Calil and the former British Prime Minister's son. (Ghazvinian 2007: 185–93, Shaxson 2007: 133–42) The country has also attracted other armed groups, presumably from the conflict in the Niger Delta, with no clear aims, economic or political. In December 2007, various motorboats with armed men assaulted a bank in Bata, and on 17 February 2009 another group attacked the Presidential Palace in Malabo, and was quickly reduced. (Güell 2009) According to opposition sources, the attacks were carried out by these groups in search of economic compensation for the services of kidnapping dissidents in Nigeria for Obiang.^{li} 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.

In some cases, these alternative transnational connections have provided personal autonomy and political leverage to the local participants; but, until now, the networks around the government have proved to be much more powerful. More civic alternative networks are also limited, to a certain extent, by the sovereignty fiction, as their demands are too restricted to the right of 'the people' of Equatorial Guinea to enjoy 'their' resources. But in addressing their claims and demands not only to the Nguema clan, but also to transnational companies, banks and international organizations, they also question the way sovereignty limits political responsibility.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has shown how political order in Equatorial Guinea is currently conformed by the confluence of activities and interests of different groups that traverse their lands and the surrounding sea, especially of those who occupy the government and the transnational (mainly American) oil companies. In spite of its novelty, this process has considerable historical depth, as oil extraction has reinforced the dynamics of extraversion in place since colonial times and the autocratic power of the ruling family who succeeded the Spaniards: the affluence of new resources has but provided new opportunities for selective inclusion and general depoliticization. At the same time, the shift to an offshore oil economy has affected local people's lives and livelihoods in very differentiated and unequal forms, whereas new transnational movements around the country have arisen as a result.

The historical integration of Equatorial Guinean territories and its people in regional and world dynamics, have promoted extraverted political economies that have brought about different authoritarian forms of power. Transnational processes and scenarios have also prompted moments of openness, as those during decolonization or the African 'second liberation'. But the wave of political reform and negotiation opened at the beginning of the nineties was halted again, once oil drillers started to extract crude from the sea soil. If oil contributed to a new closure of the political arena, it is due to its nature of capital-intensive industry and its institutional configuration, based on the legal agreement between private oil companies and governments. The late historical trajectory of the territory, along with the principles involved in the state's sovereignty established during the decolonization era, explain why a resource under the maritime soil may be dealt as a private property owned by a kind of familial criminal syndicate that happens to control a government.

The benefits obtained from the sharing contract agreements with oil companies make the population almost redundant in fiscal terms for the government; they are not of much necessity for such a low labour-intensive activity as oil extraction. This explains in great part why power relations are based on the exclusion and repression of real or potential dissidents and alternative elites, who might substitute the Nguema clan from such a rewarding site as the state. But at the same time, political domination takes the form of cooptation and differentiated integration of the population in the patronage network that unevenly crosses the country. Labour and economic relations have become privileged means of remaking selective inclusion and exclusion of individuals at all levels of society. Undoubtedly, if (a)ll states function via a mixture of personal ties and formal structures' (Cooper 2002:159), the historical specificity here is the centrality of the family clan who occupied the government since independence for most of the political and economic dynamics that traverse the country.

We have also seen how oil extraction in the sea zone of Equatorial Guinea has brought a number of social transformations to the mainland: new economic activities, of more or less formal character, have blossomed, which have attracted new inhabitants to the towns. The social space has also suffered a fragmentation, with the appearance of new neighbourhoods and walled oil compounds, side-by-side old and growing quarters and shantytowns. This has created new forms and spaces of discharge: in oil platforms and compounds, transnational companies preside over a separated social order directed towards productive processes. But in spite of its extreme enclave character and the differentiated social spaces they have conformed in the country, platforms and compounds are not structurally alienated from the surrounding territories (as the Ferguson's 'Angolan model' may suggest): rather, they are constitutive of the political order and economic dynamics there. Only sovereignty fiction permits companies to disclaim responsibility and stand apart from political or social demands.

In spite of the Nguema and companies' role as inevitable mediators between people, resources and international markets and institutions, we have also verified the existence of some space for economic autonomy; and how transnational movements, of more or less civil character, are paying more and more attention to the new oil country. If the social changes that oil is bringing about will promote new political demands in the near or remote future, or if international pressures or incursions will contribute to transform or end Obiang Nguema's regime, remains to be seen. Gas and oil depletion will probably affect the political configurations. What is for certain is that any political change in the future will entail a combination of transnational processes and internal events and social reactions.

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ⁱ McSherry (2006) makes the clearest effort to use the resource curse paradigm in order to analyse Equatorial Guinea’s current economic and political dynamics; and Wood (2004) highlights the rent-seeking dynamic among the political elite.

ⁱⁱ As for Equatorial Guinea, Harel (2006) and Ghazvinian (2007) emphasise the role of transnational companies and other governments on the current situation of the country, though none of them deny the agency of those who occupy the government.

ⁱⁱⁱ The team carried out 31 interviews in Malabo, 9 in Bata and 10 in Madrid, and purposefully met with people of different ages, gender, geographical and social origins, working in different sectors such as oil extraction, government, retail trade, education, health, construction, hostelry, agriculture or fisheries. The political conditions in the country made many people reluctant to speak with researchers, foreign or local, and their willingness to talk was one important factor in the (self) selection of our interviewees: all of them were punctually informed about the aim and nature of our work. Conversations took the form of semi-structured interviewees to one or two persons at the same time, for one to two hours, and after adopting all cautions to assure a climate that was judged secure by our informants. We normally met in closed spaces and did not record our conversations. They were conducted behind closed doors under the condition of anonymity and we did not record our conversations. The two members of the team who resided and the one who visited the country also provided descriptions and analysis of social processes useful for the research, such as new urban developments or specific social and political events. Additional testimonies were obtained with occasion of certain events where the author participated: an *International Conference on Equatorial Guinea* in Hofstra University (NY, April 2009), two seminars for socialist political leaders from Equatorial Guinea (Fundación Alternativas, Madrid, June 2009 and July 2011), two private roundtable workshops on Equatorial Guinea (Chatham House, London Feb. 2010 and Sept. 2011), and an EG Policy Forum (EG Justice, Madrid, March 2010).

^{iv} According to the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) that measure dimensions such as life expectancy and educational attainment, Equatorial Guinea is the country with the biggest gap between its per capita GDP ranking, which has increased due to oil rents to situate it in the 45th position, and its HDI ranking, which holds the 136th. (UNDP 2011)

^v According to this report, American oil companies deposited millions of dollars in bank accounts held at Riggs Bank in Washington, in the name not only of the government of Equatorial Guinea, but also of President Obiang Nguema and some of his closest relatives. '(T)he E.G. accounts represented the largest relationship at Riggs Bank, with aggregate deposits ranging from \$400 to \$700 million at a time' (US Senate 2004: 3).

^{vi} 'Biens mal acquis: la justice saisit des véhicules appartenant à la famille Obiang', *Le Monde*, 28 September 2011. Silverstein, K. 'Bipolar Policy on Equatorial Guinea', *Foreign Policy*, 13 June 2012. See also Global Witness 2009.

^{vii} 'Equatorial Guinea builds luxury resort for week-long summit', *The Guardian*, 11 June 2011.

^{viii} The last census of 2002 showed that almost 2% of population worked in the oil industry. This data is not, however, very accurate, as the census offered a total population of 1.014.999, which is almost the double that offered by other sources, such as the World Development Indicators of the World Bank, that calculate in 560.402 the population in 2002, and 676.273 in 2009.

^{ix} According to the seven local oil workers interviewed, whereas oil companies affirm to pay from 1.200 to 2.500 dollars, they receive between 200.000 and 400.000 CFA Francs (400 and 800 dollars approximately).

^x Also following the information provided by our informants, a state worker on education, health or security receives 120.000 to 250.000 CFA Francs (185 to 380 euros), whereas

engineers in the Ministry of Mines or national hydrocarbon companies gain from 1,200.000 to 2,400.000 CFA Francs. (1.830 to 3.660 euros).

^{xi} Armengol Ondo Nguema, responsible for National Security and well-known torturer. (US Senate 2004: 49, 100-1)

^{xii} ‘O te pones el chip del partido o te echan.’

^{xiii} Inflation situated in 7.1 in 2009 according to IMF 2010b, and was estimated in 8,2 for 2010 and 9 for 2011 by the Economist Intelligence Unit (cited in FAO 2011). Some of our interviewees told us about an increase in housing and food prices between five to tenfold in 10 years. See also Frynas 2004: 542-3.

^{xiv} This is so, despite the dramatic growth of social expenditure in the state budget since 2007, due to the establishment of a Development Social Fund (Republic of Equatorial Guinea 2006, IMF 2010a): the execution of the state budget very often differs from what has been established, and the government considers many items with few social implications as social expenditure, such as houses for the political elite. Telephonic interview to Plácido Micó, CPDS only representative in Parliament, 30 June 2011.

^{xv} This process was deplored by one local NGO activist in Bata: “many people no longer trust the state: if electricity does not work, they just buy a generator”.

^{xvi} The actual numbers of immigrants is difficult to calculate, but the best estimations revolved around 150.000. (‘Equatorial Guinea: Oil money draws sub-Saharan Africans’, IRIN, 22 October 2008; ‘Migrant workers outnumber Equatorial Guineans’, *Afrik.com*, 23 October 2008; ‘Le boom pétrolier attire des immigrés d’autres pays d’Afrique occidentale’, *Agenzia Fides*, 23 October 2008.

^{xvii} AI 2009a; ‘Guinée Equatoriale: Les Equatos d’abord – le pétrole ne se partage pas’, *Le Messenger*, 10 December 2007; Sumelong, E. ‘How Obiang Nguema ordered attack on Cameroonians’, *The postnewsline.com*, 13 December 2007; Güell, O. ‘Asaltado el palacio de Obiang en Malabo’, Madrid, *El País*, 18 February 2009; Soares, U. ‘Polémique sur le traitement des immigrés en Guinée équatoriale à l’approche du sommet de l’UA’, 1 June 2011, Radio France International.

^{xviii} American and Chinese are free from visa to enter the country, whereas Africans tend to enter and stay more irregularly, since the cost of residence permission, as they told us, is around 500.000 CFA Francs (762 euros).

^{xix} Chinese workers have also experienced the government harassment: eleven of them were killed and 120 wounded in a salary related conflict with their companies, which was repressed by the army (Esteban 2010: 240).

^{xx} In 1900, the Treaty of Paris between France and Spain established the limits between the French Gabon and the Spanish Guinea.

^{xxi} These juridical categories, ‘European’, ‘Native’ and ‘Black Assimilated’, were fixed with the regulation in 1928 of the institution of *Patronato de Indígenas*, previously created in 1904 (*Real Decreto* 11 July 1904, art. 34 and *Real Orden* 17 July 1928).

^{xxii} The predominance of US corporations started in 1992, when Walter International, run by a former American ambassador in the country, discovered Alba field in front of Bioko Island.

^{xxiii} Even if ‘other “illicit”, modes of elite rent-generation’ may ‘persist’ according to Wood (2004: 547), ‘legal’ products today are significantly more lucrative.

^{xxiv} Revenues of the State Budgets have quintupled since the 600.000 million CFA Francs of 2004, when rents from oil and gas were considered for the first time. (Republic of Equatorial Guinea 2004-2011) The oil and gas sector accounted for more than 85% of this revenue, apart from more than 90% of GDP and 99% of exports. (BEAC 2010, IMF 2010b)

^{xxv} These companies were created in 2001 and 2005 respectively, and their participation in joint ventures is regulated by the Hydrocarbons Law No. 8/2006, 3 November, <<http://www.equatorialoil.com/legislation.htm>>, accessed 3 June 2012.

^{xxvi} The most important and comprehensive of all the local companies is President Obiang’s Abayac complex, involved in many activities with foreign corporations; whereas Kalunga Company S.A. functions as a channel for investing part of oil revenues abroad, in foreign banks or luxurious residences in Spain or the United States. (US Senate 2004) The President’s son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang owned the companies Grupo Sofana and Somagui Forestal that work in joint ventures with Asian forestry companies. (Greenpeace 2000, Roitman and Roso 2001: 126-8, WMR 2004, Ghazvinian 2007, Global Witness 2009, HRW 2010)

^{xxvii} Statement by the President’s son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang, ‘Officials may have slice of state deals’, *Cape Times*, 9 November 2006.

^{xxviii} As part of it, the state’s rights over the natural resources in the near sea zone have been expanding since the end of the Second World War, until the 200 nautical miles of the so-called Exclusive Economic Zone (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982).

^{xxix} In Reno’s words (2001:198-9), ‘(f)irms operating in Africa still require guarantees of protection of fixed assets, enforcement of contracts, access to credit, the capacity to indemnify operations, and certifications of credibility sufficient to satisfy regulators in headquarter countries, rating services, and investors.’

^{xxx} During the last decade, the World Bank and the IMF have promoted programs of technical assistance in the country and, since 2003, the government has agreed to participate in the IMF evaluation called ‘Article IV consultations’ (Frynas 2004: 538, IMF 2010a).

^{xxxi} Kurlantzick, J. ‘The New Diplomacy: How Rogue States Hire PR Firms to Win Audiences with American Leaders’, *Mother Jones*, 7 May 2007; Bogardus, K. ‘Ex-Clinton aide to lobby for oil-rich African country’, *The Hill*, 5 April 2010.

^{xxxii} Both governments signed an Investment Incentive Agreement in 1998, and the Guinean government awarded a \$250 m a Maritime Security Enhancement Program to the American security company MPRI in 2010.

^{xxxiii} In September 2005, Obiang’s son and Vice minister of Mines, Gabriel Obiang Lima, visited Beijing to promote Chinese investments: the following year, oil companies CNOOC and CNCP signed a sharing contract with GEPetrol and both governments signed a cooperation agreement

by which Chinese companies assume the construction of numerous infrastructures and official buildings. (Esteban 2009)

^{xxxiv} The Israeli government has recently joined Morocco in the provision of security, as companies of this nationality sell weapons and train the presidential guard in Equatorial Guinea. Melman, Y. 'Israelis to train Equatorial Guinea presidential guard', *Haaretz*, 3 June 2005.

^{xxxv} In the 2007 CEMAC Summit in Ndjamena, reforms that allowed a broader representation of Equatorial Guinea were adopted: as a consequence, the Equato-Guinean Lucas Nchama Abaga was appointed governor of BEAC in January 2010.

^{xxxvi} This is the case of the Mbañe Island controversy with the Gabon government. There are also periodic conflicts around the border between the towns of Ebebiyin (Equatorial Guinea) and Kye-Ossi (Cameroon), which is used by Malabo to expel Africans from the country and has been unilaterally closed in several occasions, the last one in 2009.

^{xxxvii} Among these cases, it is worth mentioning the 1998 trial against MAIB members for an upheaval in Bioko island; the 2002 trial against FDR members and CPDS Secretary General, Plácido Micó; the trial against UP leader Fabian Nsue the same year; three trials in 2004 against alleged mercenaries of an armed plot in March 2004 with international connections; another against 80 soldiers and ex soldiers, and a last one against five people accused of an attack to Corisco island from Gabon; the 2009 trial against members of PPGE; the several trials from 2009 to 2011 against a group of Nigerians, and some members of UP, accused of participating in an armed attacks from Niger Delta; or the one in August 2010 that ended up with the execution of four former army officers, previously kidnapped in Benin (See website of AI on *Human Rights in Republic of Equatorial Guinea: News and Publications*, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/equatorial-guinea>>, accessed 29 November 2011).

^{xxxviii} As part of this strategy, the President periodically releases political or common prisoners during special days such as June 5, August 3 or October 12,^{xxxviii} before the trial or the end of their sentence.

^{xxxix} The referendum itself, celebrated under strong military pressures and regarded by international NGOs and CPDS and UP political parties as fraudulent, give the official results of 97% in favour of the reforms: abstention seems to have been very generalized (HRW and EG Justice 2011, UP 2011b, CPDS 2011c).

^{xl} The new Constitution prolongs the age of the presidency candidate up to 85 years, and establishes a Senate, an Ombudsman, a Court of Auditors, a State Council, a Council for the Economic and Social Development, as well as the figure of a vice-president: some argue that this formula will assure the automatic succession of Obiang's eldest son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang, to the Presidency. (EG Justice 2011)

^{xli} The biggest companies such as Marathon or Exxon-Mobil try however to nuance this social estrangement with limited health, education or environmental programs under the idea of 'corporate social responsibility': see for example the Malaria Control Project in Bioko island, financed since 2003 by Marathon and Medical Care Development: <<http://www.mcd.org/mcdi/egmt.html>>, accessed 27 October 2011.

^{xlii} The authorities responded by forbidding demonstrations set for International Women's Day and those organised by the CPDS and UP for March 20 and 23 respectively. <<http://www.asodegue.org>> accessed 6 July 2012.

^{xliii} One of our interviewees was an old military chief who left the country in 1997 to live in exile in Cameroon, and narrated to us how he was detained by the Nigerian police and extradited to EG in 2005.

^{xliv} See for example *Bisila Guinea Ecuatorial*; the *Forum on Equatorial Guinea*; the Facebook group *Guinea Ecuatorial y África en diáspora*; the web *Guinea Ecuatorial.net*; the writer Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's blog. There are also sites with periodic news on the country: <http://www.afrol.com/es/paises/guinea_ecuatorial>; <<http://www.asodegue.org>>; <<http://www.france-guineeequatoriale.org/>>; <<http://www.guineequatoriale-info.net/>>.

^{xliv} Silverstein, K. 'U.S. Oil Politics in the 'Kuwait of Africa'', *The Nation*, 22 April 2002. Silverstein, K. 'Oil Boom Enriches African Ruler', *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 2003.

^{xlvi} See note iv. More recently, the same subcommittee launched a new report documenting the use of US lawyers, bankers, real estate agents and escrow agents by Obiang's eldest son to move over \$ 110 m in suspect funds into the US between 2004 and 2008 (US Senate 2010, Global Witness 2009).

^{xlvii} One of the occasion for the gathering of some of them was the *Universal Periodic Review*, established at the new UN Human Rights Council, celebrated in March 2010: <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR%5CPAGES%5CGQSession6.aspx>> accessed 29 January 2012.

^{xlviii} This is the case of Marcial Abaga Barril, CPDS member and secretary of the local NGO SeJOF (and part of our research team), who has participated in almost all the PWYP regional meetings in Africa, in Limbe (2007), Abuja (2008) and Kinshasa (2011).

^{xlix} 'La comunidad lusa rechaza a Guinea Ecuatorial como país miembro', *Afrolnews*, 26 June 2010

^l 'Biens mal acquis: feu vert pour la poursuite de l'enquête', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 9 November 2010. Guerra, P. 'Las cuentas secretas de Obiang', *laprovincia.es* Diario de Las Palmas, 14 February 2010. See also note v.

^{li} 'El principal encausado por el 17-F asegura que los autores del asalto habían trabajado para Obiang', *EuropaPress*, 24 March 2010.