

# INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE AND DOMESTIC POLITICS: THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND STABILITY IN POST-INDEPENDENCE EQUATORIAL GUINEA

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most prominent features of the political development of Equatorial Guinea since gaining independence from Spain in October 1968 not have been dictatorship and almost total absence of democratic values. Yet, in the forty-four years of its independence from 1968 to 2012, Equatorial Guinea has experienced forty-one years of civilian rule. It was only from 1979 to 1982 that the country experienced military rule after the overthrow of its first president and brutal dictator, Francisco Macias Nguema. This article interrogates why Equatorial Guinea experienced such intense absolutism under supposedly civilian governments that claimed to be 'democratic', and why international pressure for the country's leaders to adopt democratic norms and values has been unsuccessful. It explores the nature of domestic politics and the factors that have influenced democratic stability in the country in the four decades studied.

Equatorial Guinea's political development shortly before independence shows that the Spanish colonial authorities that controlled the territory attempted to establish a functional and democratic political system in the course of the independence process from 1966 to 1968. A constitution that was thought would promote democracy

and good governance while at the same time addressing the complexities of the internal structures of Equatorial Guinea was drawn up in 1968. Franco's Spain attempted to establish a truly democratic structure for Equatorial Guinea even though Spain itself was under an authoritarian government in the 1960s<sup>1</sup>. A free and fair presidential election was conducted in 1968 and Francisco Macias Nguema who won the election and emerged president was not Spain's preferred candidate<sup>2</sup>. Ondo Edu, Macias' main challenger, was the preferred candidate of the Spanish government<sup>3</sup>. Edu had been a moderate and had not been fiercely anti-Spanish during the independence struggle. This had endeared him to the colonial authorities and had made Madrid to appoint him Head of Government in May 1964. Edu served for four years as leader of the autonomous government and during the period he generally did well and the Spanish government was very comfortable with him. This made him to secure Spain's endorsement in the contest for the presidency. The fact that Ondo Edu eventually lost the presidential election to Macias reveals that Spanish leaders attempted to follow democratic principles by conducting free, fair and transparent elections. Similar principles were followed in the preparation and content of

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<sup>1</sup> R. A. Carr, *Spain 1808 – 1975* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 379-387; S. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 199-202; S. Clissold, *Spain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 119-120; J. M. Roberts, *Penguin History of the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 955.

<sup>2</sup> Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, "Una Merienda de Blancos: Decolonización de Guinea". In: *Historia 16* (Madrid: Informacion Publicacione, 1968), 16; Max Liniger-Goumaz, *Brève Histoire de la Guinée Equatoriale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988), 99.

<sup>3</sup> R. Fegley, *Equatorial Guinea, an African Tragedy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 163.

the independence constitution that Spain helped to produce, although there were some provisions that ultimately encouraged dictatorship.

In spite of the measures taken by Spain in the three years before Equatorial Guinea's independence, Macias Nguema became authoritarian as soon as he took office. He moved swiftly against both real and perceived opposition to his government both within and outside Equatorial Guinea and by early 1969, tyranny and brutality had become the most prominent features of Equatorial Guinea's politics. The political system adopted at independence was the presidential structure with extensive powers for the president. There was a bicameral legislature which was reduced to a unicameral one in the 1980s and is currently composed of one hundred members. Under Macias Nguema, tyranny and political murder grew progressively and Equatorial Guinea quickly became a one party state. Moreover, no effort was made to conduct elections and the other arms of government virtually disappeared. Judgments reflected the pronouncements of Macias and law-making became a function of the dictator and the small click that surrounded him. Indeed, judges and legislators either went into hiding or fled the country in the atmosphere of mass murder that engulfed the country.

No effective governance took place in Equatorial Guinea in the charged political milieu in the country from 1969 to 1979. Critical infrastructure was abandoned and almost everything dilapidated. By the time Macias was overthrown in August 1979, Equatorial Guinea was in a state of total paralysis and the country acquired the distinction of being one of the world's worst governed countries<sup>4</sup>. Under the circumstances, democratic ideals and stability were the last things anyone

could associate with Equatorial Guinea<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the structures of democracy and good governance that the Spanish colonial authorities and the United Nations as well as leaders of the independence movement attempted to establish in Equatorial Guinea at independence were dismantled by Macias who rather chose the path of tyranny and authoritarianism. At some point, a good number of the small click that worked closely with Macias in his brutal rule became concerned about their own safety as well as country's and survival. It was from among these that the overthrow of Macias was organized in August 1979<sup>6</sup>.

Hopes of democratic revival and the establishment of good government were raised following the overthrow of Macias. It is paradoxical that it was the military government of Obiang Nguema which replaced the civilian and supposedly democratic government of Macias Nguema that was expected to re-establish democratic structures and promote democratic values and stability from late 1979<sup>7</sup>. For some time, it seemed as if the Obiang government was on the right course in setting Equatorial Guinea on the path of political stability and good governance. A transition programme was established which ushered in a civilian government in 1982. The fact that Obiang himself contested the presidency and won meant a mere change from military to civilian administration, and he has remained president for forty-two years and counting. Obiang and his party won all the parliamentary and presidential elections in from 1982 to 2009<sup>8</sup>. The country actually functioned as a no-party and one-party state from 1982-1993 and experiments with multipartism were undertaken only in response to sustained pressure from both within and outside the country. Even then, manipulations and consistent harassment from the government at different levels have emasculated the

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim Sundiata, *Equatorial Guinea, Colonialism, State Terror and the Search for Stability* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 68-69, 132-133; Fegley, *Equatorial Guinea*, 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> M. Meredith, *The State of Africa* (London: The Free Press, 2006), 239-241; R. Klitgaard, *Tropical Gangsters: One Man's Experience with Development and Decadence in Deepest Africa* (London: I.B. Tabis and Co., 1991), 19- 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Afrol News*, "History of Equatorial Guinea", London: 2001, 4. [www.afrol.com/Equatorial\_Guinea]. Accessed 25 September 2011.

<sup>7</sup> M. Liniger-Goumaz, *Small is not always Beautiful: The Story of Equatorial Guinea*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1989), 65; *Afrol News*, "History of Equatorial Guinea", 4 [www.afrol.com/Equatorial\_Guinea]. Accessed 25 September 2011.

<sup>8</sup> African Elections Database, "Elections in Equatorial Guinea: (Election Results, 2010)", 1-4" [www.africanelections.tripod.com]. Accessed 1 October 2011; Mark, Tran, "Equatorial Guinea's Ruler Extends Thirty Year Term in Contested Election", *The Guardian*, London, 30 November 2009, 1. [www.guardian.co.uk/world]. Accessed 30 September 2011.

other parties and seriously limited their capacity to function<sup>9</sup>. Many of the vices of the Macias era have also returned, although Obiang has not been as erratic and violent as Macias<sup>10</sup>. The travails of democracy and good governance in Equatorial Guinea have therefore persisted for over four decades.

In this article, we examine the crisis of democratic values and stability in Equatorial Guinea, the intricate issues in the country's political evolution and the prospects for the future. Particular attention is paid to why international pressure for Equatorial Guinea to imbibe liberal values and adopt democratic principles in politics and governance has not been successful with the result that absolutism has dominated the country's political milieu for over four decades.

## 1. THEORY, THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Many scholars have for centuries explored the meaning and nature of democracy as a political concept and a system of government. Some others have examined the issue of what constitute democratic values and stability, and whether there could be degrees of democracy- the question of whether one government could be more democratic than another. The expansion of democratic norms and the impact of international pressure for states that are perceived to be authoritarian to adopt democratic values have also attracted the attention of numerous analysts. Attempts are here made to discuss some of the arguments because they help to explain aspects of the political development of Equatorial Guinea and why international pressure for the country to adopt democratic norms has recorded very little success. The analysis is against the background of the popularity of democracy as a system of government since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, what one source describes as

“one of the most dramatic and significant events in political history”<sup>11</sup>. Aspects of democratic theory also help to explain the experience of Equatorial Guinea where the leaders have laid claim to being ‘democratic’ in their administration of the country on account of the conduct of periodic elections since the 1990s which has been invoked to ward off international pressure. Indeed, President Obiang Nguema's party, the *Partido Democratico de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), is described by the those in power as the country's truly “Democratic Party”.

Political theorists generally agree that many aspects of democracy as a concept and system of government remain a moot question. “Many meanings attach to the word democracy,” notes the scholar Bernard Crick. “If there is one true meaning”, he explains, “then it is, indeed as Plato might have said, stored up in heaven; but unhappily has not yet been communicated to us. The word is what some philosophers have called ‘an essentially contested concept’, one of those terms we can never all agree to define in the same way because the very definition carries a different social, moral, or political agenda”<sup>12</sup>. Joseph Schumpeter, Robert Dahl, Samuel Huntington, James Hyland, and Andrew Heywood, among numerous other political theorists, agree on the imprecise nature of the understanding of democracy as a concept and a system of government. “A term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all,” notes Andrew Heywood in his analysis of the differing understanding of the meaning of democracy<sup>13</sup>. Even then, there are a number of essential elements that are generally accepted to be critical to a system of government to be accepted as democratic which is why analysts are able to describe as ludicrous the claim of some tyrannical and authoritarian leaders to being democratic.

The difference in the application of the meaning of democracy by political leaders arises mainly from the popularity and acceptability of democra-

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, “Amnesty International Report 2009- Equatorial Guinea”, London, 2009, 1-3 [www.unhcr.org/refworld/docld. Accessed 1 October 2011].

<sup>10</sup> Brendan McSherry, “The Political Economy of Oil in Equatorial Guinea”, *African Studies Quarterly* 8/3, 21-12, 2006, 2.

<sup>11</sup> A. Heywood, *Key Concepts in Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 125-126; Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), xiii-xv.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>13</sup> A. Heywood, *Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 68; Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1994), 250-256.

tic governments generally around the world and the eagerness of almost every government to lay claim to it. Everyone is a democrat now or at the very least wants to be one. Accordingly, even when a system and approach to governance are antithetical to generally accepted principles of democracy, many political leaders want to describe it as democratic and lay claim to democratic credentials. As Heywood argues: “The problem with democracy has been its very popularity, a popularity that has threatened the term’s undoing as a meaningful political concept. In being almost universally regarded as a ‘good thing’, democracy has come to be used as a little more than a ‘hurray! word’, implying approval of a particular of a particular set of ideas or system of rule”<sup>14</sup>. Even Huntington states in his famous work *The Third Wave: Democratization in the late Twentieth Century* that: “I have written (this book) because I believe that democracy is good in itself and that... it has positive consequences for individual freedom, domestic stability (and) international peace”<sup>15</sup>. The tendency by numerous political leaders to describe their governments as democratic when their style of governance differs widely from one another has raised the question of whether it is possible to sketch any acceptable meaning of democracy.

It is noteworthy that among scholars, the difference in the understanding of democracy and its principles arises mainly from the adoption of different perspectives and emphasis. The Schumpeterian (as well as Huntingtonian) definition, for instance, focuses on the procedural dimension of democracy and therefore contends that a state or organization is democratic only to the extent that it adopts a system in which the most important decision makers emerge through a transparent, free, fair, periodic and all-inclusive elections. Samuel Huntington generally shares this view of democracy and states that “democracy involves the two dimensions - contestation and participation”. Arising from this understanding, Huntington argues that: “Govern-

ments produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, shortsighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by the public good. These qualities may make such governments undesirable but they do not make them undemocratic”<sup>16</sup>. This reveals Huntington’s emphasis on the procedure of election or the selection of important decision makers as the fundamental issues in the understanding of democracy.

Other analysts have emphasised freedom, liberty and especially equality as the most important principles of democracy in the mode of Alexis de Tocqueville. They do not agree entirely with the perspective of Huntington about the primacy of the mode of selecting leaders in the understanding of democracy, and Howard Fienberg has actually criticised this perspective for what he regards as Huntington’s rather narrow description of democracy which fails to adequately address other important issues such as liberty and freedom<sup>17</sup>. But the scholars that emphasise freedom, liberty and equality equally agree that elections conducted in a free, transparent and all-inclusive manner are vital as they are an important way to express freedom, liberty and the rights to representative government. Even Huntington, with all his emphasis on electoral procedure also notes that democracy “equally implies the existence of those civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble, and organize that are necessary to political debate and the conduct of electoral campaigns”<sup>18</sup>. The issues are therefore interrelated.

The reality is that the selection of important decision-makers through free and fair elections implies freedom and liberty just as the exercise of freedom implies the right to select leaders and be a part of the governing process. Therefore, although democratic principles are complex and multidimensional, the different strands are intertwined<sup>19</sup>. A measure of consensus thus exists and the perspectives are not mutually exclusive as such. This

<sup>14</sup> Heywood, *Politics*, 68-69.

<sup>15</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, xv.

<sup>16</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 7, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Howard Fienberg, “Why the Third Wave? Huntington, Democracy and the Nature of Objectivity and Social Science”, 1996, 1. [www.hfienberg.com/irtheory]. Accessed 30 September 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> James Hyland, *Democratic Theory: The Philosophical Foundation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 81; Heywood, *Key Concepts in Politics*, 125-126.

has made it possible to evaluate the democratic credentials of leaders and assess different governments to make concrete statements about whether they are democratic or not. It is in line with this understanding that we have been able to analyze the nature of politics and governance in Equatorial Guinea from 1968 to 2011. The application of the generally accepted principles of democracy has made it possible to dismiss any spurious claims to democracy by governments that have been tyrannical and authoritarian such as Equatorial Guinea has had almost throughout the post-independence period.

The analysis above also helps to understand the nature of democratic values and stability. In modern times, from Alexis de Tocqueville to James Schumpeter, Robert Dahl, Samuel Huntington, James Hyland, Bernard Crick, Benjamin Barber, Howard Fienberg, and Richard Joseph, among others, the promotion of freedom, equality and liberty, and the defence of basic rights are regarded as fundamental to any democratic arrangement<sup>20</sup>. Some have emphasised the right to representative government while others have stressed personal, economic and political freedom, but all agree that democracy is multidimensional and a combination of these principles is crucial to a democracy, properly so-called. As Crick explains: "There is democracy as a principle or doctrine of government; there is democracy as a set of institutional arrangements or constitutional devices; and there is democracy as a type of behaviour"<sup>21</sup>. The reality is that emphasis on different democratic principles by analysts is always influenced by what aspect of democracy is discussed.

An application of these ideas to the political development of Equatorial Guinea leads to the conclusion that the foundations of a democratic government were laid at independence in 1968. As already noted, the electoral process that ushered in

the first post-independence government was very well organized and the leaders that emerged from the elections were the preferred representatives of the majority of the people. In addition, although the independence constitution gave enormous powers to the president, it also contained a number of provisions to advance basic rights and protect minorities. The abandonment of democratic values began with the erratic approach and excesses of the country's first president Macias Nguema who abandoned constitutional provisions and violated rights with impunity. Democratic values have never been restored in the country over four decades after as Macias' successor Obiang has continued in a similar fashion as his uncle. Political action on the part of Equatorial Guinea's leaders has therefore been a central issue which has negatively affected democratic stability and the expansion of democratic values. As Robert Dahl has observed for the United States, there is the need for the culture of representative government and ideals of freedom and liberty to take root for democratic stability to be achieved. It is the consensus on basic values, not constitutional provisions as such (even though that too is important), that ensures an enduring democracy<sup>22</sup>. Anti-democratic political action since 1968 prevented the development of such a consensus in Equatorial Guinea although a large number Equatorial Guineans have managed to maintain a high level of democratic consciousness over the years<sup>23</sup>.

A related issue is that of democratic stability which Huntington describes as "a central dimension in the analysis of any political system"<sup>24</sup>. This generally refers to the degree of institutionalization of democratic values or the extent to which democratic principles are expected to be applied in the administration of a country or any other political unit. A wide range of activities shape the pattern of democratic stability in any country. One of the

<sup>20</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Translated by Henry Reeve (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 1-9; Robert Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 2-6; Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 1-6; Huntington, *The Third Wave*, Xiv-xv, 7-9; Hyland, *Democratic Theory*, 76-81; Crick, *Democracy*, 1-4; Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 2-9; Richard Joseph, "State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa", in R. Joseph (ed.) *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa* (Boulder, Co., Lynne Rienner, 1999), 2-14.

<sup>21</sup> Rick, *Democracy*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory*, 131-132, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Sundiata, *Equatorial Guinea*, 81-83; Francisco Evuna, Activist, Interview, Malabo, 6 June 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 11.

most important is the nature of political action by important decision-makers. Another is the degree of democratic consciousness which makes the people insist on the application of democratic principles in the governing process. In the case of Equatorial Guinea, political action in the post-independence period has been generally antithetical to democratic values. Regarding popular attitudes toward democracy in a country, different studies have revealed that where democratic consciousness is prominent, the people usually explore legitimate democratic institutions to address grievances and promote democratic stability; but where such institutions are non-existent, citizens resort to non-formal political strategies such as riots and civil disobedience. Here, the role of pro-democracy and other civil society groups is crucial for organized action to be effective<sup>25</sup>. External pressure and support for popular democratic demands is another important factor in this regard. In all these, how receptive or impervious leaders of a political unit are to popular demands is a key issue.

The analysis of the Equatorial Guinean experience in the post-independence period reveals that popular attitude has been favourably disposed to democratic values. Even before independence, the people agitated for representative government and some minority groups such as the Bubi are known to have resisted the political structure that was being established in 1967 and 1968. It took the persuasion of the United Nations and some constitutional safeguards for them to reluctantly accept the framework for independence. The absence of legitimate democratic institutions for the citizenry to promote democratic values compelled the people to increasingly resort to violence following the onset of the Macias Nguema dictatorship. However, the government violently crushed protests and any perceived opposition and the people began to flee to exile in record numbers and various sources indicate that about a third of the country's population was either killed or fled to exile between 1968 and 1979<sup>26</sup>. Things improved slightly after the

removal of Macias Nguema from power in 1979 but authoritarianism has persisted with the result that violent protests have continued apace<sup>27</sup>. Democratic consciousness in Equatorial Guinea has therefore been lively despite the asphyxiating political environment.

An important question that has been raised is why the international pressure that partly contributed to the efforts by Spain to establish democratic structures in Equatorial Guinea in 1968 failed to produce positive results in the four decades that followed. An important explanation is the fact that Equatorial Guinea, a tiny Central African country of just over half a million people did not occupy the strategic calculation of the great powers that have promoted democratic values. In addition, the country had very little to offer economically until the 1990s. And when it did have something important to offer in the form of oil and gas, the liberal democratic countries that are the advocates of democratic norms have been the main beneficiaries and this has limited the pressure they have exerted on Equatorial Guinea's authoritarian leaders. There is also the clever device by Equatorial Guinea's leaders to conduct periodic elections which has made it possible for them to lay claim to democratic norms in their governing process and difficult for international efforts to compel the adoption of genuine democratic principles. As already noted, this has always been a problematic issue in democratic theory and the practical application of democratic principles in politics and governance. A number of factors have therefore been responsible for the modest success of international efforts to promote democracy and good governance in Equatorial Guinea.

## 2. PATTERN OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN POST-INDEPENDENCE EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Francisco Macias Nguema emerged the first post-independence president of Equatorial Guinea

<sup>25</sup> David Zweig, "Democratic Values, Political Structures, and Alternative Politics in Greater China", (New York: USIP, 2002), 1-2. Working Paper.

<sup>26</sup> Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 239-240; *Afrol News*, "History of Equatorial Guinea", 3. [www.afrol.com/Equatorial\_Guinea]. Accessed 25 September 2011.

<sup>27</sup> McSherry, "The Political Economy of Oil, 6-7; Amnesty International "Amnesty International Report 2009- Equatorial Guinea", 2009, 2 [www.unhcr.org/refworld/docId. Accessed 1 October 2011]; *Afrol News*, "History of Equatorial Guinea", 2001, 5 [www.afrol.com/Equatorial\_Guinea]. Accessed 25 September 2011.

from the presidential elections held on 22 September and 29 September 1968 and he wasted no time in revealing his undemocratic credentials. By the end of 1968, less than three months after taking office, Macias had begun to go after real and perceived enemies. began to manifest dictatorial tendencies only a few months after he assumed office as president. One of Macias' earliest targets was Ondo Edu, who had served as head of the autonomous government and contested the presidential election against Macias. Ondo Edu sensed danger early and fled to Gabon but Macias had him extradited and put under house arrest in Malabo. Macias had Ondo Edu killed in early 1969. About the same time, Atanasio Ndongo Miyone, the leader of MONALIGE who had been appointed Foreign Minister at independence, and Saturnino Ibongo Iyanga, another nationalist leader, were arrested on the accusation of plotting to overthrow Macias Nguema. They were arrested on 5 March 1969 and subsequently killed<sup>28</sup>.

Foreigners in Equatorial Guinea were not spared of the Macias reign of terror. In February 1969, Macias demanded the removal of Spanish flags flying over the Spanish Consulate in Bata and the withdrawal of the 260 man Spanish Civil Guard that was left in Equatorial Guinea at independence. As he considered that compliance was slow, he sent men of the National Guard to remove the controversial flags in Bata. In the confusion that followed, a Spanish man was killed at the consulate. The Spanish Ambassador, Juan Duran-Loriga was subsequently recalled. As the face-off went on, Macias accused Franco, the Spanish leader, of trying to re-colonize Equatorial Guinea. Inflammatory broadcasts were made against Spanish nationals, and Equatorial Guinean renegade youths went on rampage<sup>29</sup>. Macias also announced that the safety of Spaniards could no longer be guaranteed, and on 1 March 1969 Franco advised Spanish citizens in Rio Muni to seek refuge in the Spanish consulate in Bata. The

Spanish government also began to evacuate its nationals from Equatorial Guinea. On 2 March 1969 about five hundred Spaniards left by sea. Other European nationals and American citizens followed suit as Macias declared a state of emergency. By the end of March 1969 only about a hundred or so Europeans were left in Equatorial Guinea of the eight thousand that were in the country at the beginning of the year<sup>30</sup>.

As Macias abandoned constitutional provisions and democratic values, he created a paramilitary organisation composed of youths, the *Juventud en Marcha con Macias* (JMM) (Youth on the March with Macias). The organisation was established at Niefang on 22 February 1969 and it was composed mainly of thugs and street urchins who molested people and committed atrocities with impunity<sup>31</sup>. The organisation eventually became a major arm of the terror machine of Macias. Members of the JMM were at the forefront of the execution of the anti-Spanish campaign of March 1969. The renegade youths targeted individuals perceived to be against the Macias government or just anyone they disagreed with and killed with impunity. Insecurity became one of the most prominent features of the social milieu in Equatorial Guinea as the country quickly degenerated into a totalitarian state. This was one of the first of the many actions that turned Equatorial Guinea to a completely lawless state in the ten years of the Macias Nguema reign of terror.

Macias abolished all the political parties in the country in January 1970 and established the *Partido Unico Nacional* (PUN) which later changed its name to the *Partido Unico Nacional de Trabajadores* (PUNT) (The Unique National Workers Party). This was Macias' party and it was the only one allowed to function. In May 1970, Macias disbanded the Senate and he assumed legislative and judicial powers along with his executive powers. In July 1972, the PUNT declared Macias "President for life, Major General of the Armed Forces and Grand Master of Education, Science and Culture"

<sup>28</sup> M. Liniger-Goumaz, *Small is not always Beautiful: The Story of Equatorial Guinea* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1989), 65; L., A. Ondo Ayang, Bokesa Camó and M. Liniger-Goumaz, *Misceláneas Guineo Ecuatorianas II. Nguemismo : 33 años de auto-golpes y torturas, corrupción nacional e internacional, Guinea Ecuatorial cultural* (Madrid : Tiempos Próximos, 2002,) 2- 8).

<sup>29</sup> A. Artucio, *The Trial of Macias in Equatorial Guinea: The Story of a Dictatorship*. (Geneva: ICJ, 1980), 5; R. Fegley, *Equatorial Guinea*, 63-64.

<sup>30</sup> Ministère de la Coopération, *Guinée Equatoriale* Paris, MC, 1980, 18-20.

<sup>31</sup> Sundiata, *Equatorial Guinea*, 101.

at its second congress. A new constitution was drawn up in July 1973 that gave all powers to Macias<sup>32</sup>. This was accompanied by daily killings of people across the country. So many were murdered in cold blood and several disappeared without trace.

The roll call of the murdered was long indeed. Torao Sikara, a Bubi chief and one of the founders of MONALIGE, was one of the early victims of the Macias political murder. Sikara was a pastor and the only known Bubi leader who campaigned vigorously for union during the constitutional conference which held shortly before Equatorial Guinea's independence in 1968. Pastor Sikara had been appointed president of the *Asamblea de la Republica*, the country's lower house at independence. In the course of 1969 Sikara was arrested and detained in Bata. He was not charged with any offence. He was said to have died of thirst in prison a few months later. It was also during this period that Enriqu  Gori Molubuela was arrested and incarcerated. Like Pastor Sikara, Molubuela was a Bubi leader who was first secretary at the foreign ministry. He was said to have been tortured in prison with his eyes gouged out. He eventually died of gangrene<sup>33</sup>.

Numerous others shared the fate of Molubuela and Sikara. In 1970, Armando Nu ez Balboa Dougan, the Fernandino mayor of Malabo was arrested by the terror machine of Macias. He was said to have died mysteriously in prison. A similar fate befell Nve Ondo Nchama, another Fernandino leader who was then minister of agriculture. He was arrested and killed by Macias' agents. About the same time, Antonio Eworo Obama, former president of the *Idea Popular de Guinea Ecuatorial* (IPGE), was arrested and subsequently disappeared without trace<sup>34</sup>. Andres Nchuchuma Miko, the civil governor of Rio Muni and Jorge Oma Ekoga, a former deputy, were also among the earliest victims of the Macias tyranny. They were arrested and summarily executed along with Hilario Engura, a civil servant. Shortly after the

execution of the trio, Augustin E eso Ne e, a prominent Ndowe leader was arrested. He was then minister of education. His offence was that anti-Macias slogans were found written on blackboards in some schools and it was thought that the minister should not have allowed it. He was subsequently killed in Malabo. A similar fate befell the director of statistics who presented demographic estimates that Macias regarded as too low. The director was promptly murdered in a most gruesome manner and his body cut to pieces to "help him learn to count". By this time, Equatorial Guinea had entered a state of total paralysis at the height of the Macias Nguema terror.

The Macias dictatorship increasingly consumed members of the Macias government in the late 1970s, and the plot to overthrow the government also came from within the inner circle. Macias was eventually overthrown in a military coup led by his nephew Teodoro Obiang Nguema on 3 August 1979. Teodoro Obiang was a lieutenant colonel in the army and a prominent member of the Macias dictatorship. Obiang Nguema promised political reforms on taking office and hopes were high regarding the restoration of democratic values and a stable government<sup>35</sup>. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights helped to draft a new constitution which provided for the abolition of the Supreme Military Council that was in place and the election of a president and parliament. A program of transition to civilian rule was commenced leading to the emergence of a civilian government on 12 October 1982. But the transition program only succeeded in producing Obiang Nguema as president and many were of the view that the elections were not free and fair<sup>36</sup>.

Obiang Nguema and his party, the *Partido Democr tico de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), won all the parliamentary and presidential elections from 1982 to 2009. All the elections were adjudged to have been characterised by manipulations and harassment of the opposition, and in the 2009 elections, the Convergence for Social Democracy

<sup>32</sup> Artucio, *The Trial of Macias*, 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Fegley, *Equatorial Guinea*, 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> Max Liniger-Goumaz, *Br ve Histoire de la Guin e Equatoriale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988), 109-115.

<sup>35</sup> Liniger-Goumaz, *Small is not always Beautiful*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Meredith, *The State of Africa*, 681; African Elections Database, "Elections in Equatorial Guinea": (Election Results, 2010), 1-4. [www.africanelections.tripod.com]. Accessed 1 October, 201.

which posed the greatest threat to the PDGE, was especially targeted<sup>37</sup>. Obiang also assumed enormous powers and his government has also been extremely repressive. Amnesty International Reports of 1983 and 2009 lamented the frequency of arrest, detention and torture of innocent citizens, and a recent analysis of political developments in Equatorial Guinea stated that “Obiang... has retained many of his uncle’s dictatorial practices... In 2003, state radio compared him to God<sup>38</sup>. McSherry similarly noted that: “Human rights groups routinely describe (Obiang) as one of the world’s worst dictators, pointing to gross human rights abuses and tight restrictions on civil and political freedoms<sup>39</sup>. In the atmosphere of dictatorship and repression, many Equatorial Guineans have sought to resist Obiang’s oppressive rule. The minority Bubi of Bioko have even established the *Movimiento para la autodeterminacion de la isla de Bioko*, a nationalist and advocacy group to protect the rights of Bioko Island’s inhabitants<sup>40</sup>. This is in spite of the relative improvement in their quality of life since the massive inflow of revenue from oil sales in the mid-1990s<sup>41</sup>.

### 3. EXPLORING THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND STABILITY IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

The analysis above clearly reveals that Equatorial Guinea has experienced the crisis of democratic values and stability throughout the post-independence period. This has been a central issue in the country’s political development. The fact is incontrovertible that the political action and erratic approach of Macias Nguema were the single most important factors that destroyed the founda-

tions of Equatorial Guinea’s democracy and compromised the country’s political stability. After a decade of tyrannical and brutal rule democratic values entirely disappeared from Equatorial Guinea political life. The level of brutalization and political murder reduced under Obiang Nguema from 1979-2011 but they remained prominent. With a different set of leaders who adopt a different approach to politics and governance, the fortunes of democracy in Equatorial Guinea would surely have been different. The experience of Equatorial Guinea has been similar to that of a number of other countries. As Huntington explains: “Governments that had democratic origins may end democracy by abolishing or severely limiting democratic proceedings, as in Korea and Turkey in the 1950s<sup>42</sup>. However, the very long time that authoritarianism has persisted in Equatorial Guinea makes the country’s political experience worrisome and raises the question of what factors have enhanced undemocratic practice.

An important issue that needs to be examined is that of democratic consciousness and the general attitude of Equatorial Guineans to democratic values. The core of the debate revolves around the question of whether Equatorial Guineans have been passive and unconcerned about the application of democratic principles in the administration of the country or whether there has been a high level of democratic consciousness but popular demand for democratic government has simply not yielded positive result. On this, a curious perspective is presented by Barrie Wharton when he asserts that the positive changes brought to Spanish Guinea by Francisco Franco compared to the backwardness experienced when the Second Republic was in power in Spain made Equatorial Guineans

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7221.htm>. 2009, 4. Accessed 3 July 2009; Elections Database, “Elections in Equatorial Guinea: (Election Results, 2010), 1-4”. [[www.africanelections.tripod.com](http://www.africanelections.tripod.com)]. Accessed 1 October 2011; Tran, “Equatorial Guinea’s Ruler Extends Thirty Year Term in Contested Election”, 1. [[www.guardian.co.uk/world](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world)]. Accessed 30 September 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Amnesty International, *Equatorial Guinea: Arrests of Pro-Democracy Activists – A Changing Pattern of Human Rights Violation* (London: Amnesty International, 1983), 1-7; Amnesty International, “Amnesty International Report 2009- Equatorial Guinea” 2009, 1-3 [[www.unhcr.org/refworld/docld](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docld)]. Accessed 1 October 2011).

<sup>39</sup> McSherry, “The Political Economy of Oil”, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Don Pedro, Activist. Interview, Malabo, 5 June 2001; Marisé Castro, “Equatorial Guinea: Recent History”, in *Africa South of the Sahara* 28<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Europa Press, 1998), 428.

<sup>41</sup> Highbeam, “Equatorial Guinea: Africa’s Kuwait”, 2001, 1. [www.highbeam.com/doc](http://www.highbeam.com/doc). Accessed 25 September 2011; Max Liniger-Goumaz, *Guinée Équatoriale 30 Ans d’État Délinquant Nguemiste* (Paris: L’hamattan, 1998), 58-59; US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7221.htm>. 2009, 4. Accessed 3 July 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 8.

to prefer an administrative structure with a strong leader at the centre. According to Wharton: "Amongst many ordinary Equatorial Guineans, there is a marked nostalgia for a strong leader like Franco as with any right-wing authoritarian regime, they identify individuals and figures with the improvement of their lot. It is this nostalgia and distaste in many ways for democracy of the Second Republic (in Spain) which brought Obiang to power in 1979 and maintained him there since despite repeated opposition attempts to overthrow him, many with foreign help. Many of these attempts have foundered due to lack of mass opposition or real interest"<sup>43</sup>.

Considering the unusually long time that dictatorship and repression have gone on in Equatorial Guinea, Wharton's argument presented above may appear logical. However, a critical examination of developments in the country reveals a totally different reality. Popular demand for representative government in Equatorial Guinea began with the formation of the first anti-colonial movement, the *Cruzada Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial* (CNLGE) in 1947<sup>44</sup>. The organization enjoyed popular support and drew membership from different parts and ethnic groups across the territory. Although the Spanish colonial authorities brutally suppressed the *Cruzada* even having one its leaders, Acacio Mané killed by men of the *Guardia Colonial*, Equatorial Guineans continued their resistance against repressive colonial policies<sup>45</sup>. And there was no difference in approach when the Second Republic was in power in Spain and when Franco took over. The same pattern of resistance continued when Spain introduced 'provincialization' in Equatorial Guinea in 1960 which made Spanish possessions in Equatorial Africa overseas territories of Spain<sup>46</sup>. As Campos has noted, Franco had tried to justify the perpetuation of colonial rule in Equatorial Guinea by

proclaiming 'provincialization' but pressure mainly from the United Nations and anti-colonial movements within the territory compelled him to proclaim autonomy for Equatorial Guinea's two provinces in 1963 in preparation for total decolonization<sup>47</sup>. International pressure therefore played a role in the approach adopted by Spain in the decolonization of Equatorial Guinea and the structure of government produced for the country at independence.

There is no doubt that Obiang Nguema has his supporters in Equatorial Guinea, just as Macias Nguema had his despite his extreme brutalization of the people. This reality, notwithstanding, available evidence reveals that there is a high level of popular democratic consciousness among Equatorial Guineans and the strong desire for representative government. There has been recourse to violence in some instances and even attempts to forcibly remove the government, some of the most prominent of which took place in 1998 and 2004<sup>48</sup>. In the absence of legitimate democratic institutions, many have resorted to non-formal strategies which involves protests and sometimes violence. What is important in the analysis is that there is nothing to suggest that Equatorial Guineans have displayed a distaste for democracy. The level of repression has been intense, but popular demand for representative government has nevertheless been vigorous.

This leads to the discussion of an important factor that has limited the effectiveness of advocacy for democracy in Equatorial Guinea namely, limited external support. The fact that periodic elections have held in Equatorial Guinea, at least since 1982, and economic opportunities which have come from the exploitation of oil and gas in the country since the mid-1990s, have made external pressure on the Obiang government somewhat

<sup>43</sup> B. Wharton, "The Impact and Legacy of Twentieth Century Spanish Colonial Policy on the Socio- Political Development of Guinea Ecuatorial", *Gefame, Journal of African Studies* 3/1 1996, 9-10.

<sup>44</sup> Liniger-Goumaz, *Brève Histoire*, 76-77.

<sup>45</sup> B. Héléali, and J. Klotchkoff, *La Guinée Equatoriale Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Les Editions du Juguar, 1999), 115-116; M. Liniger-Goumaz, *Historical Dictionary of Equatorial Guinea* (Lanhan: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2000), xxiv.

<sup>46</sup> Servicio Informativo Espanol, *Espana Y Guinea Ecuatorial* (Madrid: SIE., 1968), 120.

<sup>47</sup> Alicia Campos, "The Decolonization of Equatorial Guinea: The Relevance of the International Factor", *Journal of African History* 44(1): 2003, 95-116; René Pélissier, "Spain Changes Course in Africa", *Africa Report*, 8/12 1963, 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Afrol News*, "History of Equatorial Guinea", 2001, 5. [www.afrol.com/Equatorial\_Guinea]. Accessed 25 September 2011.

weak and spasmodic<sup>49</sup>. Considering the fact that the post-independence governments of Equatorial Guinea have been generally impervious to popular demands and protests within the country, external support is critical to success in the restoration of democratic values and stability in the country. There has been some external help, but support has not been sufficiently vigorous for popular pressure to be effective. In his study of popular political participation in Taiwan, Hong Kong and rural China, David Zweig notes that: "International pressure has affected democracy in these three societies... The United States and other countries pushed the Kuomintang (KMT) to liberalize Taiwan's policy in the 1980s ... international support has helped advocates of village democracy to promote village elections, to educate villagers about democratic procedure, and to gain the attention of local governments"<sup>50</sup>. Political developments in North Africa as well as Cote d'Ivoire in 2010 and 2011 also confirm the critical importance of external support in political transformation and institutionalization of democracy. This support has been inadequate in Equatorial Guinea and it would be of vital importance in the country's future political transformation.

The exploitation and export of oil and gas which has brought enormous wealth to the small country has been another important factor that has affected political transformation in Equatorial Guinea. The country's economic fortunes became transformed as crude petroleum began to be exported from the mid-1990s. One source notes that Equatorial Guinea's economy grew by a massive 71.2 percent in 1997, the first year of oil export, and between 2002 and 2005, GDP jumped from USD1.27 billion to USD25.69 billion. Although much of the huge earning has been looted by corrupt government officials as revealed in the scandal of 2008 which led to the resignation of the entire government of Prime Minister Ricardo Mangué Obama Nfebua, some of it has been used

to develop infrastructure and provide employment and social services. "Obiang has been gradually modernizing the country despite his dictatorial practices", notes one source critical of the repression of the Obiang government<sup>51</sup>. For a people whose lives the government has hardly ever touched positively, some simply become contented with government 'achievements'. This again emphasises the importance of grassroots political education in the country.

Extensive political education would also be needed to address another factor that has hamstrung the efflorescence of democratic values and stability in Equatorial Guinea: ethnicity. As it is common in Africa, the ethnic factor has made some to support the dictatorial rulers of Equatorial Guinea<sup>52</sup>. Both Macias and Obiang are of the Fang ethnic group in the Equatorial Guinea's district of Mongomo and their strongest support has come from the area. Some criticism of government's authoritarian policies and actions has come from among the Fang as well, but by far the strongest opposition and most sustained and violent protests have come from other ethnic groups, especially the Fernandino and Ndowe<sup>53</sup>.

External support and grassroots political education would be critical to the promotion of democratic values and stability in Equatorial Guinea in the future. This is one area that international pressure would need to focus on. As has been revealed in the Arab Spring in North Africa and protests elsewhere since 2010, the consciousness of the people and commitment to the establishment of democratic values and structures are crucial to political change. The fact that Obiang's eldest son, Teodorin, is widely regarded as the president's possible successor is indicative of the bleak future for the adoption of democratic values in the governance of Equatorial Guinea. Should Teodorin succeed Teodoro, then the culture of authoritarianism and corruption will likely continue. In the late 1990s, Teodorin was accused of "financing a lavish

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Wood, "Business and Politics in a Criminal State: The Example of Equatorial Guinea", *African Affairs* 103, 2004, 547-567.

<sup>50</sup> David Zweig, "Democratic Values, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Infoplease, "Equatorial Guineans Suffer under Dictatorship", 1. <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa>. Accessed 25 September 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Ingham, *Politics in Modern Africa* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-4.

<sup>53</sup> Sundiata, *Equatorial Guinea*, 152; Max Liniger-Goumaz, *Historical Dictionary of Equatorial Guinea* (Lanhan: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2000), xxxviii.

lifestyle with his total spending on mansions, exotic cars and other luxury goods in 2004-2009 almost double the 2005 budget for education”<sup>54</sup>. What this reveals is that there is a lot that would need to change for democratic values and stability to be re-established in Equatorial Guinea.

## CONCLUSION

Spain followed international norms and attempted to establish a democratic political and administrative system for Equatorial Guinea between 1966 and 1968. However, the structures and institutions that were established to promote representative government in Equatorial Guinea at independence in 1968 were not strengthened by the rulers of the post- independence period. Indeed, they crumbled and entirely disappeared under the brutal dictatorship of the country’s first president, Francisco Macias Nguema, from 1968-1979. Attempts have been made by since 1982 to re-establish structures to promote democratic government, but authoritarianism, corruption and repression have persisted in the country. Since

independence in 1968, only two individuals from the same family have ruled Equatorial Guinea. Macias Nguema ruled for nearly eleven years, from 1968-1979, and Obiang Nguema has ruled for thirty-three years (since 1979) and still counting. The analysis nevertheless shows that there is a high degree of popular democratic consciousness among Equatorial Guineans, but political action and intense repression have stultified efforts by to promote and expand democratic values. Other factors such as scanty international support for the cause of democracy in Equatorial Guinea, the huge resources and international economic opportunities made possible by the exploitation and export of oil and gas as well as ethnicity have all combined to promote the perpetuation of dictatorship and repression in the country. Of particular importance is international pressure on the leaders and support for the cause of democracy. The efforts would need to be expanded and the strategy restructured to strengthen local pressure groups. This should enhance the expansion of democratic values and promote good governance in the future.

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<sup>54</sup> Tran, “Equatorial Guinea’s Ruler Extends Thirty Year Term in Contested Election”, 1.