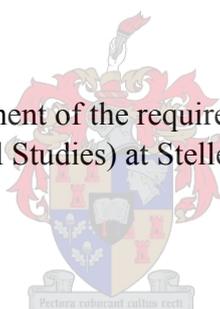


# **A policy of plunder: the development and normalisation of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea**

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"Cr tki'2014

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## ABSTRACT

Equatorial Guinea has, since the mid-1990s, been an oil-rich state. With the highest GDP per capita it should be a continental leader in terms of development. Instead, it ranks in one of the worst positions on the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). This study employs the theory of neo-patrimonialism to explain why such a discrepancy in these development indicators is evident.

As a result of examining the post-independence regimes in Equatorial Guinea through the theoretical lens of neo-patrimonialism it is possible to conclude that the country is afflicted by a governance curse, rather than the more narrowly defined 'resource curse' that has become the central explanation of the situation in the country since the discovery of oil favoured by the existing literature on the subject. Instead, this study highlights the fact that the neo-patrimonial nature of the regime in Equatorial Guinea has developed steadily over the years since independence was granted by Spain in 1968, and indeed, the seeds of this system were in fact evident during Spanish colonial control.

Whilst the existing literature has focused on the role of oil in explaining the dire state that Equatorial Guinea finds itself in, this study argues that there are other central factors that need to be examined. These include: the Spanish colonial legacy that led the way for such a system to take root; the role of the first post-independence president, Macías Nguema (1968-1979) and; the regime of Obiang Nguema (1979-present). By looking at these factors in addition to the role of oil it is possible to conclude that the neo-patrimonial system in place in Equatorial Guinea has much deeper roots than the existing literature acknowledges. It is vital to examine these deeper roots in order to discover an understanding of and effective solution to the current situation. Moreover, through examining the central features and operations of the 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime in Equatorial Guinea, most notably the profligate spending and evident capital flight, it is possible to acknowledge the

international nature of the problem: a factor that has heretofore been neglected in the literature. A greater focus on this issue is necessary in order to understand why the regime is sustained and what prospects there can be for future regime change.

The outcomes of the study suggest that a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime is *the* central explanation for how the political sphere operates in Equatorial Guinea. This means that there can be no distinction made between the central features of the state and the personal property of those that rule it. It is a classic, modern-day example of ‘*L’État c’est moi*’. As such, the Nguema family have since independence treated the state resources as their own private property to do with as they wish. This means that there has been no attention paid to the development of Equatorial Guinea as it is not in the interests of the ruling elites to do so. Instead, they utilise state resources for their own self-enrichment. Such behaviour accounts for why despite having the highest GDP per capita on the African continent, Equatorial Guinea has such a low rank in the UNDP Human Development Index. It can therefore be concluded that Equatorial Guinea is affected by a governance curse that has decimated the state since independence, rather than the popularised theory of a ‘resource curse’ which has been used in explanations since the discovery of oil in the mid-1990s.

## OPSOMMING

Ekwatoriaal-Guinee is reeds sedert die middel negentigerjare 'n olieryke staat. Met die hoogste BBP per capita behoort dit die leier op die vasteland te wees wat ontwikkeling betref. Dit beklee egter een van die laagste plekke op die menslike ontwikkelingsindeks (HDI) van die Verenigde Nasies se Ontwikkelingsprogram (UNDP). In hierdie studie is die teorie van neopatrimonialisme gebruik in 'n poging om die teenstrydigheid in hierdie ontwikkelingsaanwysers te verklaar.

Op grond van 'n ondersoek van die regimes ná onafhanklikheid in Ekwatoriaal-Guinee deur die teoretiese lens van neopatrimonialisme kan die gevolgtrekking gemaak word dat die land onder 'n regeringsvloek gebuk gaan, eerder as die eng gedefinieerde 'hulpbronsvloek' wat die vernaamste verklaring geword het vir die situasie in die land sedert die ontdekking van olie, soos in die huidige literatuur oor die onderwerp aangevoer word. Hierdie studie beklemtoon hierteenoor die feit dat die neopatrimoniale aard van die regime in Ekwatoriaal-Guinee met verloop van tyd ontwikkel het sedert Spanje die land in 1968 onafhanklik verklaar het. Die sade van hierdie stelsel was inderwaarheid reeds sigbaar tydens Spaanse koloniale beheer.

Waar die bestaande literatuur fokus op die rol van olie in die verklaring van die nypende toestand waarin Ekwatoriaal-Guinee verkeer, word in hierdie studie aangevoer dat ander kernfaktore ook ondersoek moet word. Dit sluit in die Spaanse koloniale erfenis wat die weg gebaan het vir die groei van so 'n stelsel; die rol van die eerste president ná onafhanklikwording, Macías Nguema (1968–1979); en die regime van Obiang Nguema (1979 – tans). Deur hierdie faktore tesame met die rol van olie in oorweging te bring, kan die gevolgtrekking gemaak word dat die neopatrimoniale stelsel in Ekwatoriaal-Guinee veel dieper wortels het as wat in die bestaande literatuur erken word. Die ondersoek van hierdie dieper wortels is noodsaaklik ten einde begrip van en doeltreffende oplossings vir die huidige situasie te verkry. Deur die ondersoek van die kernfaktore en -bedrywighede van die 'roofsugtige' neopatrimoniale regime in Ekwatoriaal-Guinee, vernaamlik die roekelose verkwistinge en sigbare

kapitaaluitvloei, is dit moontlik om die internasionale aard van die probleem te identifiseer – ’n faktor wat tot op hede in die literatuur nagelaat is. Groter fokus op hierdie kwessie is nodig ten einde te begryp waarom die regime volgehou word en watter vooruitsigte daar is vir toekomstige regimeverandering.

Die uitkomstes van hierdie studie doen aan die hand dat ’n ‘roofsugtige’ neopatrimoniale regime inderwaarheid die vernaamste verklaring is vir die werking van die politieke sfeer in Ekwatoriaal-Guinee. Dit beteken dat geen onderskeid getref kan word tussen die kerneienskappe van die staat en die persoonlike eiendom van diegene in bewind nie. Dit is ’n klassieke, hedendaagse voorbeeld van ‘*L’État c’est moi*’. As sodanig hanteer die Nguema-familie sedert onafhanklikwording die staat se hulpbronne as hul eie private eiendom wat hulle na willekeur aanwend. Dit beteken dat geen aandag gegee word aan die ontwikkeling van Ekwatoriaal-Guinee nie, aangesien dit nie in die belange van die heersende elite is om dit te doen nie, en hulle staatshulpbronne vir selfverryking gebruik. Sodanige gedrag verklaar die land se lae posisie op die UNDP se HDI. Die gevolgtrekking kan dus gemaak word dat Ekwatoriaal-Guinee onder ’n staatsvloek ly, wat die staat sedert onafhanklikwording afmaai, eerder as die gewilde teorie van ’n ‘hulpbronnvloek’.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
DLP	Developmental Leadership Program
EG	Equatorial Guinea/Equatorial Guinean
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JMM	<i>Juventud en Marcha con Macías</i> (Youth on the March with Macías)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
SAS	Special Air Service
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US/U.S./USA	United States of America
WDI	World Development Indicators

## **A NOTE ON THE TEXT**

Whilst carrying out the research for this study it was found that a variety of spellings have been used, depending on whether the traditional Spanish or an anglicised version has been chosen. For the most part the true Spanish spelling has been adopted in this study, unless the anglicised version was found to be the most common. Moreover, due to the colonial and post-colonial history in Equatorial Guinea, place names have changed over time. As such the study attempts to use the correct place name for the specific period, and indicates if it has since or previously been known as something else. The exception throughout however, is in relation to quoted text; in which case the author's original spelling/name has been replicated.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Oil kindles extraordinary emotions and hopes, since oil is above all a great temptation. It is the temptation of ease, wealth, strength, fortune, power. It is a filthy, foul-smelling liquid that squirts obligingly up into the air and falls back to earth as a rustling shower of money. To discover and possess the source of oil is to feel as if, after wandering long underground, you have suddenly stumbled upon royal treasure. Not only do you become rich, but you are also visited by the mystical conviction that some higher power has looked upon you with the eye of grace and magnanimously elevated you above others, electing you its favorite. Many photographs preserve the moment when the first oil spurts from the well: people jumping for joy, falling into each other's arms, weeping. Oil creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free. Oil is a resource that anesthetizes thought, blurs vision, corrupts. People from poor countries go around thinking: God, if only we had oil! The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident, through a kiss of fortune and not by sweat, anguish, hard work. In this sense oil is a fairy tale and, like every fairy tale, a bit of a lie.*

Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The World Bank's 2013 World Development Indicators (WDI) once again make sobering reading on development in Africa. Marcelo Guigale (2013), the World Bank's Director of Economic Policy and Poverty Reduction Programs for Africa, highlights the most problematic finding: "When you look at the list of countries with the highest incidence of extreme poverty -- say, above 40 percent of the population -- you can't help noting that most of them are rich or very rich in natural resources, things like oil, gas or minerals." Likewise, Ori (2013) reports that "currently, African nations with fewer natural resources are making better progress in combating poverty than resource-rich countries such as Equatorial Guinea." Particularly astonishing, is that since the late 1990s Equatorial Guinea has "enjoyed exceptionally high revenues from petroleum exports" (Europa 2012:1671) and "in 2004 rapid expansion of the hydrocarbon industry led to spectacular GDP growth of 31.7%"(Europa 2012:1673). As a result, Equatorial Guinea boasts the highest GDP per capita in Africa: \$27, 478 (2011): it is classed as a high income country by the World Bank (2013b).

Yet, completely at odds with this figure, is the fact that Equatorial Guinea is currently one of the lowest ranked countries in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI): 136 out of 187 countries (UNDP 2013). The Europa World Year Book 2012 (2012:1673) notes:

Absence of any visible improvement in the living standards among the general population since the early 1990s (in January 2006 the UN Development Programme announced that more than 70% of Equato-Guineans subsisted in poverty on less than \$2 per day) has been variously attributed to corruption, the disadvantageous terms of many contracts negotiated by the state petroleum company, and reduced international aid.

Mills (2010:2) argues that “far from being the fount for development, Africa’s oil wealth has served instead to enrich elites.” Nowhere is this more evident than in Equatorial Guinea which Taylor (2010:138) notes is “routinely described as a ‘criminal state’.” Consequently, although “oil represents 92 percent of its total exports, and despite a sudden inrush in capital in terms of both investment and receipts from oil, there has been minimal improvement in the economic and social welfare of its citizens” (Taylor 2010:139). Bridge and Le Billion (2013:125) similarly describe how, “oil seduces those who would control it, feeding dreams of instant wealth and economic transformation [...] Developing through oil is an aspiration for many oil-producing countries but the reality in everyday life for many [...] falls far short of this goal.” It is important to remember that, “Government revenues should not be confused with the flow of benefits to citizens” (Bridge and Le Billion 2013:140). In the case of Equatorial Guinea this point really cannot be stressed enough, as little oil revenue escapes the kleptocratic grasps of the ruling elite. As a result, it is an archetypal example of a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Whilst the World Bank league tables suggest Equatorial Guinea is doing swimmingly with its vast GDP increases, its people are drowning in the misery of poverty. Only the elites benefit from the oil wealth, creaming off huge sums—US-based Riggs Bank

acknowledged that some US\$500million had been paid into an account to which President Obiang Nguema was the sole signatory; international petroleum companies were alleged to be the source of the funds (Europa 2012:1671)—to fund lavish lifestyles. Meanwhile, their people live on less than US\$2 a day. Shaxson (2008:122) draws the disturbing contrast between one of Equatorial Guinea's plush oil congress's and how:

Outside the big hall [...] restrained by a low wall and the soldiers, people in tattered shirts and flip-flops stood in dirty brown groups, watching and listening. The chances are that they cannot afford doctors, one in six of their children die before their fifth birthday, and their drinking water tastes of mud.

Fernando Abaga, an Equatorial Guinean UN economist describes how “oil has worsened the differences between our citizens [...] An opulent majority sails in a sea of misery” (Abaga quoted in Shaxson 2008:122). Similarly, Clarke (2007:91) describes the oil enclave, created in the capital, Malabo as: “islands of prosperous oil modernity amid a sea of traditional deprivation.” Such a situation has led many to declare that Equatorial Guinea is crippled by a ‘resource curse’. It is, however, the case that the situation has been steadily developing since independence in 1968. The discovery of oil has only seen growing attention paid to the situation in Equatorial Guinea and provided increased bounty for the neo-patrimonial elites to feed off. To fully understand the current situation in Equatorial Guinea, it is necessary to trace the development of neo-patrimonialism in the country since independence and the concurrent underdevelopment of the country. The discovery of oil is just one element in this tawdry story; along with the colonial legacy and the role of the ruling Nguema family.

Ghazvinian (2007:175) explains that, “in a country so small and so oil-rich that it ships close to one [US] \$50 barrel of oil for each of its citizens every single day, this wealth has had little impact on the population.” This fact is supported by Runge and Shikwati (2011:10) who note that “geological resources have been synonymous to Sub-Saharan Africa's curse of underdevelopment. Weak political governance and institutional structures on the continent transformed the vast valuable geological

resources into a nightmare for the citizenry.” The disastrous effect that oil has had on Africa and Equatorial Guinea in particular is summed up by Shaxson (2008:1):

Producing oil seems to be a bit like taking cocaine: if you are already healthy it might invigorate you, but if you are weak or sick, as many African countries are it can do serious harm [...] Oil can also be a bit like heroin: the injection of cash from each cargo delivers a feeling of well-being, but the effect over time is addiction. Just as heroin addicts lose interest in work, health, family, and friends and focus increasingly on the next fix, so politicians in oil-dependent countries lose interest in their fellow citizens, as they try to get access to the free cash.

The idea is that oil corrupts all. If only oil had never been discovered. In the case of Equatorial Guinea however, it is not the oil itself that is the problem, more the people in control of it. There exists in Equatorial Guinea a deeply-embedded neo-patrimonial political culture. Its roots lie in the colonial legacy of the country and its development and normalisation is down to the Nguema family who have been in control since independence from Spain in 1968. It is their personalisation of the state as their own property and their dining out on its resources that is responsible for the malaise that Equatorial Guinea suffers from; making it one of the most underdeveloped states in Africa. This is completely at odds with its vast GDP per capita growth over the last two decades. Since the discovery of oil in the late 1990s and the accelerated rate of its extraction and the profits that result from this, there has been a mistaken label of a ‘resource curse’ attached to explain the disastrous underdevelopment that continues to plague Equatorial Guinea. However, it is in fact the entrenched political culture of neo-patrimonialism that is to blame. Indeed, Clarke (2010:528) describes how “the oil resource curse in Africa has [...] become the fashionable poster child for Africa’s woes.” Furthermore, there is:

A misunderstanding of the source of most difficulties cited as endemic to oil [...] as if the absence of the oil industry would have created a better state of affairs and oil patrimony has been the sole cause of a presumed once-utopian world. The many responsibilities and faults of governments are often skirted around (Clarke 2010:529).

Oil should not be seen as the cause of Equatorial Guinea's malaise. It is merely an instrument used by the ruling elites for self-enrichment. Indeed, Ghazvinian (2007:177) believes it "fair to say that Equatorial Guinea is less a functioning country than it is a lucrative family business that happens to come with a flag, an anthem, an army, and a seat at the United Nations." The reason why the Nguema's can run Equatorial Guinea as though it is merely their family business (albeit one valued at hundreds of millions of US dollars) is because they operate within a neo-patrimonial system.

Such a system, according to Chabal and Daloz (1999:16), means that "the state is no more than a décor, a pseudo, Western façade masking the realities of deeply personalized political relations. There may well appear to be a relative institutionalization of the main state structures but such bodies are largely devoid of authority." Such a system is a combination of patrimonialism—"where power is concentrated in the personal authority of one individual ruler [...] The leader is above the law, and indeed often *makes* the law by personal decree [...] patrimonial leaders treat all political and administrative concerns of state as their own personal affairs. The state is their private property, and the act of ruling is, consequently, quite arbitrary" (Thomson 2010:117)—and a legal-rational bureaucracy (dominant in the Western system)—in which "Governments rule on the citizen's behalf, formulating, executing and enforcing laws designed to advance the collective good [...] those within the state officiate impersonally, putting society's interests above their own. A bureaucratic culture of public service overrides any ideas officials may harbour about using state institutions for their own private gain" (Thomson 2010:110). In the case of Equatorial Guinea, it will become apparent that neo-patrimonialism accounts for the political culture there, with a closer resemblance to the pre-colonial culture of patrimonialism than the legal-rational bureaucracy that it was hoped would take hold following independence in 1968. Indeed, the political culture in Equatorial Guinea is perhaps best summed up by Jackson and Rosberg's (1982:18) observation of governance in Africa as being "more a matter of seamanship and less one of navigation—that is, staying afloat rather than going somewhere." Politics are to blame for the underdevelopment of Equatorial Guinea, not oil—although it does certainly

grease the wheels of the patrimonial machine. Leonard and Straus (2003:1) observe that “Sub-Saharan Africa’s development problems are inseparable from its politics.” Correspondingly, Leftwich (2000:11) argues that “the centrality of politics to development cannot be stressed strongly enough.” Furthermore, “it is nowhere more important than in Africa to establish why politics has been both so venal and often so brutal, why state formation has been so ‘disordered’ and why, in consequence, developmental performance has been so weak” (Leftwich 2000:86). Undoubtedly, ‘venal’, ‘brutal’ and ‘disordered’ sum up politics in Equatorial Guinea. ‘Disorder’ characterises neo-patrimonialism according to Chabal and Daloz (1999:xix) and is key to its ‘working’, in its own way:

The notion of disorder should not be construed, as it normally is in classical political analysis, merely as a state of dereliction. It should also be seen as a condition which offers opportunities for those who know how to play the system. Whether, however, such a situation is conducive to (economic and political) development as it is normally understood is a totally different question.

Taylor (2010:3) illustrates how:

Under a neo-patrimonial system the separation of public from the private is recognized (even if in practice only on paper) and is certainly publicly displayed through the outward manifestations of the rational-bureaucratic state—a flag, borders, a government and bureaucracy, etc. However, in practical terms the private and public spheres are habitually not detached and the outward manifestations of statehood are often facades hiding the real workings of the system.

The neo-patrimonial system of government is “nefarious to good governance” according to Chabal (2009:70) and Lockwood (2006:5) describes how, “behind a formal facade of sovereign government, informal patronage relations have undermined the capacity of states to plan and deliver development projects [...] A downward spiral into corruption has been the result.” As a result of such practices, Leftwich (2008) believes that the state in Africa closely resembles France under Louis

XIV and a belief that '*L'État c'est moi*'.<sup>1</sup> This is a mind-set that is undoubtedly held by President Obiang Nguema who is "like God in heaven. He has all power over men and things" (Shaxson 2008:125). This thesis will examine how the kleptocratic tendencies of the Obiang family and the system of neo-patrimonialism (in particular the weakness of state institutions as a result of the colonial legacy) that dominates Equatorial Guinea explain the dire situation of underdevelopment that continues to plague the country.

### 1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND FOCUS

The World Bank (2013) has found that resource-rich countries are less successful at alleviating poverty than resource-poor countries. Given the vast GDP per capita of Equatorial Guinea, compared to other African states, it cannot be denied that there are the resources available to tackle poverty head on. The problem, it would therefore seem, is the management and utilisation of these resources. The key explanation for this paradoxical state of affairs, is the dominance of neo-patrimonialism in the Equatorial Guinean political system. This political culture existed long before the discovery of oil in the 1990s. The increased focus on Equatorial Guinea: once the armpit of Africa (Shaxson 2008:29); now being heralded as the Kuwait of the continent (Woods 2004:547) has meant that oil has been (erroneously) blamed for the country's woes. In fact, oil has just acted to grease the wheels of the existing neo-patrimonial machine that dominates the Nguema regime. The focus of this research will therefore be: How has the system of neo-patrimonialism developed and become entrenched in Equatorial Guinea to the extent that it is now the norm? The research will provide a chronological study of the establishment of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea from independence to the present day. It will primarily focus on: the colonial legacy; the role of the Nguema family and; the discovery and extraction of oil. By producing such a study it will be possible to see how and why neo-patrimonialism has had such a detrimental effect on Equatorial Guinea and as a result, why, despite being one of Africa's richest states in terms of resources, Equatorial

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<sup>1</sup> Louis XIV in seventeenth century France was regarded as seeing the state as his own personal property to do with as he wished — it was to prove his ultimate downfall.

Guinea is one of the continent's poorest performers in terms of poverty and inequality alleviation.

#### **1.4 GOALS, THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS**

As the problem statement articulated, this thesis will be focused on providing an explanation of the role that neo-patrimonialism has played in the underdevelopment of the Equatorial Guinean state. By focusing on how the system of neo-patrimonialism has developed in Equatorial Guinea it will be possible to see how the normalisation of such a system provides an explanation for why despite having the highest GDP per capita on the African continent (and by a significant amount), Equatorial Guinea is consistently ranked at the bottom end of the UNDP's HDI.

The research question that will act as the spring board for this study is: How did neo-patrimonialism take hold in Equatorial Guinea and how does this system explain the desperate state of the country today?

This research question will then be sub-divided into three smaller, more manageable sub-questions in order to tackle the research in a systematic and logical manner.

1. How did the Spanish colonial legacy provide the conditions for neo-patrimonialism to develop in Equatorial Guinea?
2. How has the Nguema family entrenched neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea to the extent that it has become the *modus operandi* for all state activities and makes it a unique example of neo-patrimonialism in Africa?
3. How has the discovery of oil in the 1990s and the resultant vast revenues provided by its extraction sustained the neo-patrimonial system to the extent that the personal and legal-rational are indivisible; leading to a state of *L'État c'est moi*?

As Woods (2004:547) makes clear, "Whilst accumulation centring on a tiny elite is widespread on the African continent, the concentration and nature of the activity have

had particularly adverse consequences in Equatorial Guinea.” It is for this reason that a focus on the processes of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea has been chosen, so that an understanding can be built of the “complex and dynamic web of elite rent-generation and [...] the extent to which the development of an oil industry has contributed to a monoculture of accumulation” (Woods 2004:547-48). It is this monoculture of accumulation that dominates the neo-patrimonial system that characterises the political economy of Equatorial Guinea and is responsible for the continued underdevelopment of this ‘armpit of Africa’.

Before proceeding, it is vital to define two key terms that are central to the study. These are: neo-patrimonialism and underdevelopment.

◆*Neo-patrimonialism*: Thomson (2010:128) defines patrimonial rule as “political authority based on an individual, where the state itself, and the affairs of the state are the personal interests of the ruler. All within this political system owe their position and loyalty to the one leader.” Neo-patrimonial rule is therefore “where patrimonial rule is exercised through the remnants of legal-rational institutions (Thomson 2010:128).” A quasi-system operates. On the outside, grand suggestions of good governance can be made, whilst behind the facade, the smoke-filled rooms of corruption and patronage are where the real decisions are made (Kelsall 2002:597).

◆*Underdevelopment*: refers to an economy that has not yet reached its full potential and therefore development is slower than it should be. Underdeveloped countries are characterised by their distinct wealth disparity.

This study will be based on the theory of neo-patrimonialism and this concept will be introduced and defined fully in chapter two before being further explored over the course of the thesis to show how it is *the* central explanation for the current malaise affecting Equatorial Guinea.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND LIMITATIONS**

This study will comprise a qualitative examination of secondary material readily-available in the public domain. Initially a literature survey of the existing theory of neo-patrimonialism will be undertaken before adopting a theoretical framework to be applied to the case study of Equatorial Guinea. Consequently, a historical account and political analysis will be provided through an exploratory and explanatory research design. As a result, it will be possible to trace and explain the development and entrenchment of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea and therefore provide a clear understanding of why an analysis of Equatorial Guinea through a neo-patrimonial theoretical lens is central to understanding the current malaise that affects the state.

Whilst it would be beneficial to undertake primary data collection in Equatorial Guinea, this is not feasible due to restrictions on time, finances, space and the security situation which would have to be negotiated before and during a visit to Equatorial Guinea. As a preliminary survey of the literature readily available on the regime and country, in general, make clear, those researchers who have successfully gained entry into Equatorial Guinea, have more often than not had their fieldwork cut short and at times data and notes destroyed—this highlights the highly secretive nature of the regime and is evidence both of their repressive behaviour and their intolerance to criticism. As a result of the sensitive nature of the subject in Equatorial Guinea it is only possible to work with information that is already in the public domain. Any figures and statistics quoted are from international organisations including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and United Nations departments to ensure the utmost accuracy. Indeed, these figures are likely to give a truer picture than any provided by the Equatorial Guinean state.

A further limitation in regards to the resources available is that there is a relative dearth of material available, particularly prior to the oil boom which began in the mid-1990s. Moreover, the majority of literature available covering the colonial and early post-colonial period is published in Spanish. This does, however, make the case

for why this study is so important as it highlights the relative lack of attention paid to Equatorial Guinea in comparison to more widely acknowledged neo-patrimonial regimes, such as Zimbabwe.

## **1.6 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

The remainder of the study will be illustrated through four further chapters. The study will follow in chronological order so that a clear picture is created of how a system of neo-patrimonialism has developed and become entrenched over time, from Spanish colonialism, through the initial period of independence to the so-called ‘resource curse’ that has engulfed Equatorial Guinea since the discovery and subsequent extraction of oil in the mid-1990s.

Chapter two provides a theoretical overview of existing literature concerning neo-patrimonialism. It then details the adoption of the chosen framework for analysis—that of Bach (2012) and Bavister-Gould’s (2011) idea of ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regimes which explain what is happening in Equatorial Guinea and Chabal and Daloz’s (199) ‘disorder as a political instrument’ to explain why the system has endured for so long and looks set to remain. By doing this, it is possible to provide a clear theoretical framework which can be applied to analyse neo-patrimonialism in the specific case of Equatorial Guinea.

The third chapter has a strong historical element as it traces the roots of a system of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea. It begins by detailing the experience of Equatorial Guinea under Spanish colonialism and how this sowed the seeds for neo-patrimonialism to develop upon independence being granted in 1968. The second half of the chapter is focused on the regime of the first post-independence president; Macías Nguema and paints a comprehensive, tragi-comic and shocking picture of a dictatorial regime that rivalled only Amin and Bokassa for brutality and bizarreness. Overall, this chapter provides a clear basis for the development of a deep-rooted system of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea.

Chapter four is concerned with the entrenchment of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea. It describes the regime of Obiang Nguema and highlights the fact that any hopes of there being a break with the dictatorial ways of Macías were soon dashed. The focal argument in this chapter is that neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea under Obiang has become all-consuming to the extent that the state now resembles a family business rather than a functioning legal-rational bureaucratic state of a Western ideal. The latter part of the chapter provides a commentary of the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea and the effect that this has had on the prospects of the state: serving only to fuel an already well-established neo-patrimonial regime. It also muses on the potential to curb the excesses of the regime through transparency initiatives and how their lack of success to-date, could be improved upon in the future. In sum, this chapter paints a clear picture of the depressing state that Equatorial Guinea finds itself in currently despite having the highest GDP per capita in Africa; and explains how the theory of neo-patrimonialism is central to explaining and in turn understanding why the development prospects for Equatorial Guinea are so uninspiring and disappointing.

Finally, chapter five brings together and summarises the preceding study. It provides an overview of the findings and makes clear the answers to the research questions and hypothesis detailed in this introductory chapter. It highlights the sorry state of affairs in Equatorial Guinea and justifies why the neo-patrimonial theory is central for understanding the quandary that the Equatorial Guinean state is in and how the case study displays a unique and fascinating example of an African neo-patrimonial state. Lastly, this chapter contemplates the potentiality for further research and highlights the need for greater attention to be paid to this heretofore neglected state in the armpit of West Africa due to its growing role in international relations; most notably through its centrality to the world oil market. Furthermore, an attempt is made to predict what the future may hold for Equatorial Guinea once the oil runs out and the potential for a regime change.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW OF NEO-PATRIMONIALISM

*“The ship of state is the only ship that leaks from the top”*  
Sir Humphrey Appleby, *Yes, Minister*

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Understanding the theory of, and existing literature on neo-patrimonialism is necessary in order to fully grasp the concept, its applicability to Africa generally, and Equatorial Guinea specifically. This chapter begins by introducing the concept of neo-patrimonialism before providing a comprehensive overview of the literature which has already been produced to illustrate this phenomenon. The development of the theory will be traced from its roots in Weber’s ‘traditional’ authority of patrimonialism to its current incarnation as neo-patrimonialism: combining both traditional patronage and a modern legal-rational bureaucracy in a hybridised system. An outline of the theoretical framework which will be adopted is also given as well as an explanation given as to why such a framework has been chosen. This chapter leads the way for the analysis of the development of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea which comprises the remainder of this thesis.

#### 2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION: NEO-PATRIMONIALISM

According to Leonard and Straus (2003:2) the popularised image of Africa is as, “a continent of corrupt dictators who preside over fractious populations.” Whilst such a statement has a propensity to enforce Afro-pessimist opinions, they argue that such an opinion of African politics “has a long pedigree in scholarship on the continent” and “reflects an academic consensus about the modal dynamics of African politics—the personal rule paradigm.” It is the prominence of personal rule with which the concept of neo-patrimonialism is primarily concerned. Indeed, Leftwich (2008:213) notes that “there is the absence of any sharp distinction between the *rulers* and the *institutions of rule*.” As a result, the state in Africa is often seen as the personal property of the

president, a modern-day example of ‘*L’État c’est moi*’ popularised by Louis XIV in seventeenth-century France (Leftwich 2008:213). Similarly, van de Walle (2001:16) describes how the weakness of the state in Africa following decolonisation meant that it “became *neopatrimonial*, combining an external facade of modern rational-legal administration with an internal patrimonial logic of dyadic exchange, prebendalism, and the private appropriation of public resources by state elites.” It is this combining of the traditional and modern; private and public; institutionalised and informal which defines neo-patrimonialism and emphasises its unique nature on the African continent. Thomson (2010:110) describes how:

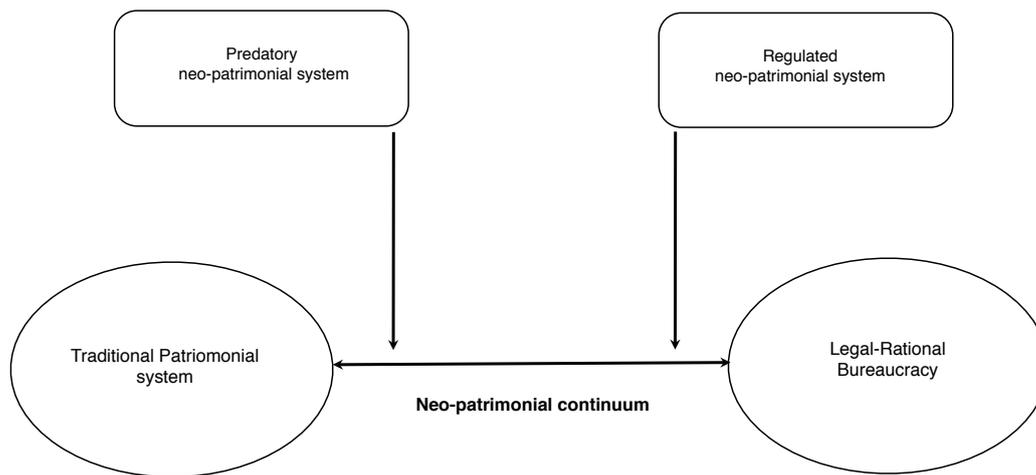
At first glance, the continent’s political institutions such as parliaments and executives, may seem familiar, but a closer examination reveals these institutions to be very different from those found in the West. The façade of a legal-rational bureaucracy may remain, but behind this façade lies a completely different political environment [...] ‘personal rule’ superseded any notion of ‘legal-rationalism’.”

Similarly, Taylor (2010:3) explains that:

Under a neo-patrimonial system the separation of public from the private is recognized (even if in practice only on paper) and is certainly publicly displayed through outward manifestations of the rational-bureaucratic state—a flag, borders, a government and bureaucracy, etc. However, in practical terms the private and public spheres are habitually not detached and the outward manifestations of statehood are often facades hiding the real workings of the system [...] Many postcolonial African leaders have rather relied on effected control and patronage.

Although neo-patrimonialism does not apply to all states on the African continent, it is widely believed that a large proportion of its states do exhibit features which have become attributable to a system of neo-patrimonialism. It should also be noted (as will be expanded upon later in this chapter) that there are different degrees of neo-patrimonialism, from the regulated system in Botswana to the all-encompassing predatory form which—this study will argue—is seen in Equatorial Guinea. Indeed, Bach (2012:29) stresses that, “political systems where patrimonial practices tend to be regulated and capped should be distinguished from those where the patrimonialism of the state has become all-encompassing, with the consequent loss of any sense of public space or public policy.” As such it is possible to see neo-patrimonialism located

on a continuum: the modern legal-rational bureaucracy (the Western ideal) would occupy one extreme, with the ‘traditional’ patrimonial system at the other. Neo-patrimonialism could be seen as occupying the middle ground: a hybrid system which encompasses both aspects. It is also a fluid concept, which depending on the leadership style could see a state moving along the continuum in either direction: becoming more or less regulated or predatory.



**Figure 1: Neo-patrimonialism continuum (author’s own model devised from Bach’s (2012) theory of neo-patrimonialism).**

Bratton and van de Walle (1994:458), leading proponents of the theory of neo-patrimonialism, make clear the centrality of neo-patrimonial theory to politics in Africa, describing it as “the distinctive institutional hallmark of African regimes.” They also emphasise that, “while neopatrimonial practice can be found in all polities, it is the *core* feature of politics in Africa” (Bratton and van de Walle 1994:459). Therefore, Bratton and van de Walle (1994:459) argue that neo-patrimonialism is the central model for analysing politics in Africa:

Personal relationships are a factor at the margins of all bureaucratic systems, but in Africa they constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions. The interaction between the “big man” and his extended retinue *defines* African politics, from the highest reaches of the presidential palace to

the humblest village assembly. As such, analysts of African politics have embraced the neopatrimonial model.

In sum, the neo-patrimonial model has become *the* central scholarly explanation of why politics in Africa operates so differently to that of the Western ideal of legal-rational bureaucracy. Moreover, Chabal and Daloz (1999:9) note that “the neo-patrimonial approach seeks to make sense of the (real or imaginary) contradictions to be found in the state in sub-Saharan Africa.” As Hyden (2013:97) emphasises, “personal rule remains prominent in Africa.” This is enacted most obviously through the system of neo-patrimonialism. This hybrid system—straddling both the patrimonial methods of ‘traditional’ authority popular in pre-colonial Africa and the legal-rational bureaucracy that was introduced to modernise the state at decolonisation—dominates politics on the African continent and a clear understanding of it is necessary in order to make sense of how such apparent ‘disorder’ actually ‘works’ (Chabal and Daloz 1999), and as a result why this system of governance has endured on the continent for so long. We shall now turn to the development of this concept in order to provide such an explanation.

### **2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW: FROM PATRIMONIALISM TO NEO-PATRIMONIALISM**

Since it was first applied to the study of African politics in the late 1970s by Médard, the body of literature on neo-patrimonialism has grown to the extent that it has become *the* definitive theory for describing how politics have played out on the African continent since independence (Bach 2012; Hyden 2000). As with any political science theory, there are of course discrepancies between the different theorists, with unique observations made by specific works. On the whole, however, there is broad-based agreement on what constitutes neo-patrimonialism and how this is evident in politics on the African continent. The existing literature will be reviewed and analysed, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of the theories and the advantages and disadvantages to adopting different explanations. The development of the theory will be traced, before the theoretical framework (which will be adopted for later analysis) of Bach (2012), Bavister-Gould (2011) and Chabal and Daloz (1999) is introduced. These theories help to explain what is happening in Equatorial Guinea

(Bach 2012; Bavister-Gould 2011); whilst Chabal and Daloz's (1999) notion of 'disorder as a political instrument' is central to understanding why neo-patrimonialism's normalisation means that it is likely to endure, as it is not in the interests of the ruling elite to adapt it to encourage broad-based development that would benefit the populace as a whole.

In one of the earliest works on neo-patrimonialism in Africa, Jackson and Rosberg (1982:18) illustrate that, "in African countries governance is more a matter of seamanship and less one of navigation—that is, staying afloat rather than going somewhere." Their comment is by no means a unique observation of African politics. Mills (2010:16) notes that "bad choices have been made because better choices in the broad public interest were in many cases not in the leaders' personal and often financial self-interest." Indeed, Smith (2008:234) explains that, "too often, especially in Africa, the alternative to a developmental state has been a predatory state led by 'rapacious officialdom'. At the extreme, the state becomes a kleptocracy: less an agency for providing law, order, security, justice, and welfare, and more a device for endowing the political elite with power, wealth, and privilege." Similarly, Leonard and Straus (2003:3) describe how, "little distinction is made between the ruler and the state—an extreme form of seeing government as personal property—and the ruler's personal decisions always take precedence over formal laws." The term attributed to such a system is neo-patrimonialism.

It is generally agreed that the roots of the theory of neo-patrimonialism lie in Weber's definition of 'traditional' authority: patrimonialism (Leftwich 2008; Thomson 2010; van de Walle 2001; Kelsall 2011; Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Theobald 1990; Hyden 2000; Gazibo 2012; Bruhns 2012; Bach 2012; Sandbrook and Barker 1985). Thomson (2010:117) explains that:

Patrimonialism is similar to personal rule. It is a form of political order where power is concentrated in the personal authority of one individual ruler. The leader gains this position from their status in society. He or she may be bound by traditions or customs, but there are no legal-rational constraints on government. The leader is above the law, and indeed often *makes* the law by personal decree. In this respect, patrimonial leaders treat all political and

administrative concerns of the state as their own personal affairs. The state is their private property, and the act of ruling is, consequently, quite arbitrary.

Similarly, Sandbrook and Barker (1985:89) note that:

Sultanism, as Weber calls it, or personal rule is [...] a form of patrimonialism that arises when rulers have no constitutional, charismatic-revolutionary or traditional legitimacy. A chief or strongman emerges and rules on the basis of material incentives and personal control of his administration and armed force. Fear and personal loyalties are the mainstays of a personalistic government untrammelled by traditional or modern constitutional limitations.

In other words, the state and its leader are inseparable; the leader rules as though the state is their personal property, with which they can do as they wish. Indeed, Kelsall (2011:76) describes how the system of patrimonialism “is held together by the personal distribution of material resources and perks [...] distributed and consumed as though they were the private property of the ruler and/or his staff.” Weber (1978 quoted in Hyden 2013:98) defined the system as follows:

The patrimonial office lacks above all the bureaucratic separation of the “private” and “official” sphere. For the political administration, too, is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part of his personal property [...] The office and the exercise of public authority serve the ruler and the official on which the office was bestowed; they do not serve impersonal purposes.

Such a system of governance is clearly at odds with the legal-rational bureaucracy that has come to dominate and define the Westphalian system. Bratton and van de Walle (1997:62) explain that, “Weber distinguished patrimonial authority from legal-rational authority, in which the public sphere is carefully distinguished from the private sphere; written laws and bureaucratic institutions routinize the exercise of authority and protect individuals and their property from the whims of capricious leaders.” It is such a system that is exhibited throughout the Western world of liberal democracies. According to Leftwich (2008:214), “many characteristics and functions distinguish the modern state. But it was the development of institutions of rule and governing which were formally separated from not just the rulers but the officials who ran them, on the one hand, and the citizenry, on the other hand, that was central in the shift from what Weber called ‘traditional’ forms of rule and authority, including

patrimonial politics, to the modern state.” Sandbrook and Barker (1985:115) note that “Weber believed that only bureaucracy could provide modern capitalism with what it required.” The characteristics that would be possessed by his ideal bureaucratic organisation included: “(1) the definition of a fixed jurisdiction for each public office; (2) the arrangement of those offices in hierarchical order; (3) the appointment and promotion of employees on the grounds of technical competence and training; (4) the separation of public office from the officeholder’s private or business activities; and (5) the treatment of employment in an office as a full time, permanent job” (Sandbrook and Barker 1985:115-16).

A cursory glance at bureaucracies and the wider running of states shows that such an ideal is rarely found on the African continent. Thomson (2010:110) describes how, “it was legal-rational government [...] that was meant to underlie the state authority in post-colonial Africa. This was to be provided by liberal democratic institutions left by the imperial powers.” The success of such a transformation, however, was not achieved. Jackson and Rosberg (1982:1) believe that “politics in most Black African states do not conform to an institutionalized system [...] Politics are more personalized and less restrained.” Indeed, Chabal and Daloz (1999:8) describe the state in Africa as, “in Weberian terms, no more than an artificially ‘modern’ political edifice.” Similarly, Kelsall (2002:597) notes that whilst outward grand gestures of good governance may be made, the real decisions are made in the smoke-filled rooms dominated by corruption and patronage networks, that lie behind this façade. It is this combination of the legal-rational bureaucracy that defines the ‘modern’ state with the patrimonial system of the ‘traditional’ state defined by Weber that gives rise to a system of neo-patrimonialism. Bratton and van de Walle (1997:62), provide the following succinct, yet all-encompassing explanation of neo-patrimonialism.

As with classical patrimonialism, the right to rule in neopatrimonial regimes is ascribed to a person rather than to an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. One individual [...] often a president for life, dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws [...] Officials occupy bureaucratic positions less to perform public service, their ostensible purpose, than to acquire personal wealth and status...The chief executive and his inner circle undermine the effectiveness of the nominally modern state administration by

using it for systematic patronage and clientelist practices in order to maintain political order. Moreover, parallel and unofficial structures may well hold more power and authority than the formal administration. To summarize, the characteristic feature of neopatrimonialism is the incorporation of patrimonial logic into bureaucratic institutions.

Lockwood (2006:5) similarly notes that: “a common observation is that African states are hybrid in nature. Budgets, laws, bureaucracy, cabinet and parliament are all features of modern African states but they coexist with personal rule and patronage.” Thomson (2010:110) describes how “legal-rational institutions did not prosper in Africa after independence [...] Power was removed from civil society and peripheral institutions of the state, and hoarded instead within the core executive, often with just one individual being dominant.” As a result, Chabal and Daloz (1999:95) believe that, “the state in sub-Saharan Africa is nothing other than a relatively empty shell [...] the real business of politics is conducted informally and, more stealthily, outside the official political realm.” As a result:

The state is both *vacuous* and *ineffectual*. It is *vacuous* in that it did not consolidate, as was once expected, on the foundations of the colonial legacy but instead rapidly disintegrated and fell prey to particularistic and factional struggles. It became an empty shell. As a result it failed to acquire either the legitimacy or the professional competence which are the hallmarks of the modern state. It is *ineffectual* in that it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper institutionalization of the state apparatus. Or to put it another way, its usefulness is greatest when it is least institutionalized (Chabal and Daloz 1999:14).

It is this central argument that, Chabal and Daloz (1999:xviii) call the “political instrumentalization of disorder.” This concept will be elaborated on shortly, where it will become apparent that this disorder is “in fact a different ‘order’” (Chabal and Daloz 1999:155) which suits those in control of the state as it serves their goal of self-enrichment. It is “the very weakness and inefficiency of the state [that] has been profitable to the African political elites” according to Chabal and Daloz (1999:14) and as such, “the instrumentalization of the prevailing political (dis)order is thus a disincentive to the establishment of a more properly institutionalized state on the Weberian model.” In sum, why would African elites want to reform a system that works so well for them?

## 2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.4.1 'Regulated' .v. 'Predatory' Neo-Patrimonialism

It is, according to van de Walle (2001:51), apparent that “political authority in Africa is based on the giving and granting of favors, in an endless series of dyadic exchanges that go from the village level to the highest reaches of the central state.” As a result, it can be assumed that, “most African states are hybrid regimes, in which patrimonial practices coexist with modern bureaucracy.” Indeed, Jackson and Rosberg (1982:12) note that, “almost everywhere in Black Africa, systems of personal rule have come into existence.” It should, however, be noted that although neo-patrimonialism is to some extent present in the majority of states in Africa, it is enacted to different degrees. This is a observation that has not been highlighted enough by theorists of neo-patrimonialism, but is a fact that Bach (2012) makes central to his explanation of neo-patrimonialism. He differentiates between ‘regulated’ and ‘predatory’ forms of neo-patrimonialism. As was mentioned earlier and is shown in *Figure 1*, it is possible to see these two aspects of neo-patrimonialism as occupying different ends of the spectrum that is the neo-patrimonial continuum.

Whilst Chabal (2009:70) notes that neo-patrimonialism is widely seen as being “nefarious to good governance”, Bach (2012:29) believes that regulated forms, in which “the distribution of resources and prebends is sometimes formalized and takes place on an inclusive basis”, although not ideal, is the lesser of two evils. This is because:

Even though notions such as public ethics and common good may be undercut, regulated neopatrimonialism conveys its own brand of ‘moral economy’, in so far as it favors redistribution processes that target the national territory [...] The inclusive nature of such practices may also go along with a modulation in scope and intensity: some administrative sectors operate according to legal-bureaucratic rules with the result of a capacity to generate ‘public’ policies. The imprint of regulated neopatrimonialism is capped and ringfenced (Bach 2012:29).

An example of such a system, would be Botswana, where currently neo-patrimonialism is practiced, but within the established legal-rational bureaucracy of what is widely-acknowledged as Africa's most developed democracy.

The opposite end of the spectrum is 'predatory' neo-patrimonialism. This is where patrimonial practices dominate the state to such an extent that any sense of public space is lost and legal-bureaucratic rules and measures cease to exist (Bach 2012). In a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial system, Bach (2012:30) argues that "personal rule and control of resources reach a paroxysmic level" and as a result, "the idea of a dissociation between public office and the ruler's private interests tends to become irrelevant" (Bach 2012:31). It can therefore be deduced, according to Bach (2012:31) that, "the distinction between regulated and predatory forms of neopatrimonialism signals the two extremes of a diversity of empirical configurations [... and] an operational distinction should be drawn between neopatrimonialism *within* the state and patterns of neopatrimonialism that permeate the *entire* state." The example used to illustrate a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial system is the regime of Mobutu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre) from 1965 to 1997. Bach (2012:31) describes how "Mobutu's 'predatory' rule [...] involved the permeation of the state by a level of corruption so pervasive as to have become its most visible and defining property." Such a system is, as will be argued and illustrated in the subsequent chapters, evidenced by the Nguema regime in Equatorial Guinea. Ghazvinian (2008:170) goes so far as to describe it as a "self-parodying burlesque of a tin-pot kleptocracy", whilst Williams (2011:621) argues that "there is a strong case to be made that Equatorial Guinea has the worst government in the world." At the very least, it will be argued, it is *the* archetypal example of 'predatory' neo-patrimonialism on the African continent.

The necessity to differentiate 'predatory' leadership from other forms of rule in Africa is also emphasised by Bavister-Gould (2011) on behalf of the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) whose work is focused on the role of elites. Bavister-Gould (2011:1) explains that "'predatory' rule can be regarded as the extreme opposite of 'developmental', 'accountable', or 'responsive' forms of rule." This is a

point supported by Cammack (2007:600) who notes that in such regimes the “overarching logic is to gain and retain power at all costs. In such circumstances, policy decisions about development and governance are subordinated to that single, overriding goal.” Such regimes are characterised by the following elements according to Bavister-Gould (2011:1-2):

- (a) a high degree of political power concentrated in personal rule, mediated through, and sustained by, what is in effect a narrow ‘predatory coalition’, without traditional, ‘customary’ or coherent ideological justification or legitimacy;
- (b) the use of this power to control economic resources, accompanied by wide discretion in their use or distribution;
- (c) the failure to use such resources for any observable developmental purpose;
- (d) the absence of any plausible or practical evidence of a vision or commitment to promote long-term and sustainable growth, development or the systematic provision of public goods;
- (e) a ruthless application of coercion and repression to gain and especially maintain power;
- (f) the use of a mixture of fear and reward as a means of retaining the loyalty of immediate followers and supporters;
- (g) the use of often considerable brutality and exclusion as the means for punishing opponents or competitors;
- (h) the systematic erosion of both public institutions and the rule of law, and the transgression of customary institutions; and
- (i) a consequent degradation of the economy.

Bach (2012) and Bavister-Gould’s (2011) theories of ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonialism will be adopted to analyse the situation that is found in Equatorial Guinea. Moreover, such a ‘predatory’ adaptation of the neo-patrimonial system is in-line with Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) theory of the political instrumentalization of disorder, an examination of which, is now undertaken.

#### **2.4.2 The ‘political instrumentalization of disorder’**

*Africa works!* This is the conclusion of Chabal and Daloz (1999). Yes, it is clear that in Africa politics are “not ordered in the sense in which we usually take our own politics in the West to be” (Chabal and Daloz 1999:xix). Yet, the apparent disorder that is witnessed in neo-patrimonial regimes in Africa, is in fact just a different type of order, and it works, or at least it does for those who know how to play the system;

namely, the elites in control. Chabal and Daloz (1999:xviii) call this the “political instrumentalization of disorder,” which “refers to the processes by which political actors in Africa seek to maximize their returns on the state of confusion, uncertainty, and sometimes even chaos, which characterizes most African polities.” In other words, it is by keeping the state as ‘disordered’ as possible that elites can gain most from the state: the more disordered the state apparatus is, the easier it is to undertake the characteristic elements of neo-patrimonialism (corruption, rent-seeking, stealing resources, personal enrichment). Indeed, the state is *most effective* for elites when it is *most ineffective*. Chabal and Daloz (1999:14) illustrate this when they argue that the state is “*ineffectual* in that it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper institutionalization of the state apparatus. Or to put it another way, its usefulness is greatest when it is least institutionalized.” As such, it is not in the elites’ interests to reform such a system. Institutionalising the state would only limit their ability to do their job (as they view it): profiting from their position. Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) point helps to explain the enduring nature of the neo-patrimonial state on the African continent and it is an incredibly important one to stress. Yet, they are one of only a few theorists to make such a point: “what we want to stress here, in contrast to most current interpretations, is that there are powerfully instrumental reasons for the informalization of politics” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:2).

According to Chabal and Daloz, it is impossible to understand politics in Africa, without understanding the way in which this disorder has been instrumentalized. This point is summed up when they argue that:

To understand politics in such a context is to understand the ways in which individuals, groups and communities seek to instrumentalize the resources which they command within this general political economy of disorder. To speak of disorder is not, of course, to speak of irrationality. It is merely to make explicit the observation that political action operates rationally, but largely in the realm of the informal, uncodified and unpoliced—that is, in a world that is not ordered in the sense in which we usually take our own polities in the West to be (Chabal and Daloz 1999:xix).

The reference to rationality and the Western viewpoint is also a central reason for Chabal and Daloz’s theoretical framework being adopted. They are one of only a few

theorists who instead of considering the system of neo-patrimonialism in Africa as a failure of modernisation and the adoption of the Western legal-rational bureaucratic order, in fact credit the system of neo-patrimonialism in Africa as being both rational and an intentional rejection of the Western system.

There prevails in Africa a system of politics inimical to development as it is usually understood in the West. The dynamics of the political instrumentalization of disorder are such as to limit the scope for reform in at least two ways. The first is that, where disorder has become a resource, there is no incentive to work for a more institutionalized ordering of society. The second is that in the absence of any other viable way of obtaining the means needed to sustain neo-patrimonialism, there is inevitably a tendency to link politics to realms of increased disorder [...] There is therefore an inbuilt bias in favour of greater disorder and against the formation of the Western-style legal, administrative and institutional foundations required for development (Chabal and Daloz 1999:162).

Whilst Chabal and Daloz (1999:104) acknowledge that “such a state of affairs may not be desirable in the long term for the country as a whole [...] it remains both entirely coherent and eminently reasonable for those Africans who can manage to benefit from the system as it *works*.” Therefore, “even if such practices are nefarious to the macro-‘development’ of African countries, since it makes rational economic activity practically impossible, there are good reasons why they are not likely to disappear” (Chabal and Daloz 1999:103). A key point made by Chabal and Daloz (1999:xix) is that, “the notion of disorder should not be construed, as it normally is in classical political analysis, merely as a state of dereliction. It should also be seen as a condition which offers opportunities for those who know how to play the system.” Similarly, Cammack (2007:602) argues that it “is not a dysfunctional public service but one that functions according to a different logic.” This logic is the central motivation of ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial systems: to treat the state as your own personal property and to do with it as you will as long, as you profit from it. Developing the state has nothing to do with it. It is as Cammack (2007:600) succinctly puts it “a logic of personal and particularist interest rather than national betterment.” It is the neo-patrimonial approach, according to Chabal and Daloz (1999:9) that seeks to make sense of such a situation:

The neo-patrimonial approach seeks to make sense of the (real or imaginary) contradictions to be found in the state in sub-Saharan Africa. From this perspective, the state is simultaneously illusory and substantial. It is illusory because its *modus operandi* is essentially informal, the rule of law is feebly enforced and the ability to implement public policy remains most limited. It is substantial because its control is the ultimate prize for all political elites: indeed, it is the chief instrument of patrimonialism. The state is thus both strong and powerless, overdeveloped in size and underdeveloped in functional terms.

This final point, emphasising the contradictory nature of the state, is key to understanding and making sense of the operation of the neo-patrimonial system in Africa. Indeed, it is Chabal and Daloz's (1999) emphasis on the nature of the state, how disorder is in fact order by a different logic, and how this disorder 'works' that makes it (along with Bach (2012) and Bavister-Gould's (2011) theories of 'predatory' neo-patrimonialism) one of the most useful theories for analysing the development of the neo-patrimonial state in Equatorial Guinea. This is because, in addition to explaining what the neo-patrimonial state is (the premise of earlier theories of neo-patrimonialism), they also explain why such a system exists and as a result why it endures and will do so for the foreseeable future.

## **2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

By providing an overview of the existing literature concerned with the concept of neo-patrimonialism it is possible to see both what the premise of the theory is and also its applicability to the example of Equatorial Guinea. The theory of neo-patrimonialism provides an explanatory framework for understanding how the 'traditional' system of patrimonialism combines with the modern (primarily Western) legal-rational bureaucratic system to create a hybrid system, which accounts for the unique nature of politics in Africa. It emphasises that whilst states in Africa may possess the characteristics of a modern state: sovereignty, a flag, judiciary, bureaucracy, parliament etc. these elements are merely a façade. The real decisions are still (largely) made behind closed doors, in the 'smoke-filled rooms' through highly personalised methods of governance. Whilst the system of neo-patrimonialism is fairly widespread across the African continent, its degree is varied. It should be seen as a continuum with 'traditional' patrimonialism at one extreme and legal-rational

bureaucracy at the other. Differentiation needs to be made between ‘regulated’ and ‘predatory’ forms of neo-patrimonialism. ‘Predatory’ regimes bear the closest resemblance to the pre-colonial phenomenon of patrimonialism where the state is treated as the personal property of the ruler. Such a system permeates the entire state to the extent that institutions fail and corruption and kleptocracy become the defining characteristics of the state. This concept of ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonialism as articulated by Bach (2012) and Bavister-Gould (2011) will be applied to the example of Equatorial Guinea. This is because, as will become apparent over the course of the remainder of the study, this theory is a central explanation of how politics is enacted in Equatorial Guinea.

Whilst such a system is largely at odds with the legal-rational system popularised in the West, Chabal and Daloz argue that such a system is seen as rational on the African continent, merely operating under a different logic to that of the West. The disorder that is witnessed in the state in Africa does in fact work, as it benefits those in control of the state. As a result, it has been seen as being in the elites best interests to instrumentalise this disorder to ensure that it continues: the more disordered the state is, the easier it is for them to profit from it. Such disorder also accounts for why the system of neo-patrimonialism endures on the continent. Why would elites wish to reform (by democratisation) such a system that works so well for them? It is this expanded interpretation of the system of neo-patrimonialism in Africa that makes this the most fitting theoretical framework to be adopted in order to explain why such a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial system has become entrenched in Equatorial Guinea and why it is likely to remain in the future.

## CHAPTER III

# THE ROOTS OF NEO-PATRIMONIALISM IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA: THE COLONIAL LEGACY AND RULE OF MACÍAS NGUEMA

*“And this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth.”*  
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

### 3.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Having conceptualised the theory of neo-patrimonialism in the preceding chapter, this chapter will serve to illustrate the theory in practice; in order to show how neo-patrimonialism has taken root and developed in Equatorial Guinea. The chapter will begin by providing a brief overview of the geography and history of this small African state. Following on, an insight will be given into the colonial legacy that was bestowed on Equatorial Guinea by the Spanish and how this laid the foundations for a system of neo-patrimonialism to take root. Finally, the rule of Macías Nguema (the first post-independence president) will be examined to explain how he introduced and normalised the system of neo-patrimonialism that became all-encompassing during the first eleven years of Equatorial Guinean independence: from 1968 to 1979. Overall, this chapter will provide a clear understanding of how neo-patrimonialism began to develop in Equatorial Guinea, to the extent that it can be seen as the central explanation of this state’s political system.

### 3.2 THE GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA

One of the most common observations about Equatorial Guinea, is that it is “one of the least known countries in the world” (Fegley 1991:xiii). Indeed, Cronje (1976:5) notes that, “few people outside Africa have heard of Equatorial Guinea. Those who have, vaguely recall that some notoriety attaches to it, but they tend to confuse Equatorial Guinea with the Republic of Guinea, a former French colony which is also known as Guinea-Conakry, to differentiate it from its newly independent neighbour,

Guinea-Bissau.” Roberts (2006:18) describes its location as in “the armpit of Africa, a small patch of land divided between a square of mainland territory and a scattering of islands in the Gulf of Guinea” (see *Map 1*).



**Map 1: Map of Equatorial Guinea (UN 2005).**

### 3.2.1 The Geography of Equatorial Guinea

As can be seen in *Map 1* Equatorial Guinea consists of the two islands in the Gulf of Guinea: Bioko (prior to independence known as Fernando Po and home to the capital, Malabo) and Annobón; and the mainland enclave of Río Muni—wedged between Cameroon to the north and Gabon to the south (Fegley 1991:xv). Indeed, Sundiata (1983:82) notes that, “like most present-day African countries, Equatorial Guinea was born of colonial partitioning. For most of the past century, the Spanish presence was, at best, superficial.” Moreover, the different parts of the country experienced different levels of colonial encroachment. For example, “on the island [Fernando Po], the Spanish allowed some of the indigenous Bubi to establish themselves in the professions or enter Spanish employment. Few such benefits were extended to the populations of the mainland. This neglect enabled the people of Rio Muni to remain more immune to the cultural imperialism of the metropole” (Sundiata 1983:82-83). One of the biggest issues that has faced Equatorial Guinea since colonial times is that it is “composed of two very different parts” (Yates 2012:90) and as a result Clarke (2010:136) suggests that it is “a fragmented state in all senses.” It will become apparent that such a history and geography has provided ripe conditions for a system of neo-patrimonialism to become established.

### 3.2.2 The Colonial History of Equatorial Guinea

A central explanation for the course that Equatorial Guinea has followed since independence, is that it was a Spanish colony: the country’s only African possession. Roberts (2006:19) explains how, “for two centuries Spain owned the territory, but showed almost no interest in its only tropical African possession.” Moreover, “the Victorian explorer Henry Morton Stanley called Fernando Po a ‘pearl in the Gulf of Guinea’, but added he would not give a penny for a ‘jewel which Spain did not polish’” (Roberts 2006:19). Zeleza and Eyoh (2003:201) explain that “Equatorial Guinea’s history in the twentieth century was strongly defined by its encounter with imperialism and colonialism.” Similarly, Wornoff (1988:vii) argues that part of the reason for such obscurity surrounding Equatorial Guinea is “its origin in the more

restricted and less penetrable colonial empire of Spain.” Fegley (1989:16) believes that, “the Spanish were the least successful imperial power in equatorial Africa.” Such arguments are supported by Ghazvinian (2007:170-71) who notes that:

The peculiar trajectory of Equatorial Guinea’s history can best be understood in the context of its status as the only former Spanish colony in sub-Saharan Africa [...] because virtually all African countries function under educational, political and legal systems similar to those bequeathed to them by the former colonial powers, a strong institutional divide exists between the Anglophone and Francophone blocs [...] Scraped together from the territories of Spanish Guinea and given independence (almost by accident) in 1968, Equatorial Guinea has never been able to tap in fully to a larger community of African states, and has remained on the fringes of the continent’s politics.

Undoubtedly, it is the fact that Equatorial Guinea holds a unique colonial history on the African continent that partly accounts for the lack of knowledge and resultant interest surrounding it. Its small size and relative obscurity has allowed for its chequered and troubled history to be largely ignored; virtually unnoticed. This was not always the case, however. Cronje (1976:7) describes how, “the obscurity which surrounds Equatorial Guinea is quite recent. Its island province off the West African coast, Fernando Po, was discovered by the Portuguese in 1472 and aptly named ‘Formosa’ — the beautiful. Three hundred years later Portugal exchanged the island with Spain for large tracts of land in South America, an important part of what is now Brazil.” She continues by describing how:

In 1858 Madrid appointed the first Governor General for Fernando Po, and Spanish colonial rule started in earnest. Nevertheless, Spanish settlement was initially slow [...] It was only towards the end of the century that Spanish interest in Fernando Po became more active. There had been an increase in the world demand for cocoa, and the island’s proven suitability for growing the crop attracted the attention of Spanish planters (Cronje 1976:7).

Similarly, Sundiata (1990:32) notes that, “although colonial penetration was slow, the almost nonexistent Spanish presence of the nineteenth century was replaced by a growing number of Europeans [...] In 1868 the European presence was one of the strongest in equatorial Africa with relation to the indigenous population.” It was, however, the case that, “until well into the twentieth century, much of the population remained beyond the influence of control [...] and] Spanish control was even more

tenuous on the mainland. In the early 1920s colonial authority was still unestablished” (Sundiata 1990:33). On the whole, Artucio (1979:3) argues that, “colonial policies brought great misfortune to the country.” Conversely, Clarke (2010:137) suggests that, “despite earlier neglect, Spain put major effort into development in the 1960s.” Likewise, Wornoff (1988:vii) argues that Equatorial Guinea was, “far from poorly endowed upon independence in 1968 and showed signs of joining the African community as a reasonably prosperous and successful member.” Such a positive outlook was, however, according to Clarke (2010:137) “before Macias took the helm.” This chapter will proceed by looking at the legacy of Spanish colonialism (up to independence in 1968), before examining the eleven years of Macías Nguema’s rule (from 1968-1979) in the context of how these events fostered a system of neo-patrimonialism.

### **3.3 THE SPANISH COLONIAL LEGACY**

As has already been established in the preceding section, the legacy of Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea can be seen as a central explanation for how and why a system of neo-patrimonialism has taken root in the country since independence. The following section will detail the principal aspects of colonial rule that laid the conditions for neo-patrimonialism being so easily established following independence from Spain in 1968 and how Equatorial Guinea could decline so rapidly from having a promising future at independence (Clarke 2010; Wornoff 1988) to sinking into a “morass of murder and mayhem” over the course of only a few years (Meredith 2006:239). The four main aspects which will be focused upon are: (1) unequal colonisation and development; (2) Spanish paternalism; (3) rapid decolonisation and; (4) Spanish fascism at home. It is to these aspects and how these allowed the system of neo-patrimonialism to take root and develop that we now turn our attention.

#### **3.3.1 Unequal colonisation and development**

The previous section on the geography and history of Equatorial Guinea has touched upon this detrimental aspect of Spanish colonialism. The geographical layout of the state; combining the different territories of the mainland enclave of Río Muni and the

two islands of Fernando Po and Annobón meant that there was a lack of unity between the island and interior communities and (as with many other African states) Equatorial Guinea (or Spanish Guinea as it was then known) was born simply through colonial partitioning and treaty negotiations between different colonial powers, with little regard for the inhabitants of these territories. Indeed, Sundiata (1983:82) notes that:

While nominally ruled by Madrid since the end of the 1700s, the island portion of the republic (formerly Fernando Po) was not entirely explored by Europeans before 1900. The bulk of the coast of Rio Muni was claimed by France until the 1900 Treaty of Paris, which conceded it to Spain. Although the Paris treaty established the frontiers of Spanish Rio Muni and an administration was organized in 1904, most of the territory remained unexplored by the Spanish until the 1920s.

As a result of such a discrepancy in the level of colonial encroachment, differing levels and extents of development were experienced in the different territories. The islanders of Fernando Po much more used to European presence than those occupying the mainland territory. Indeed, Sundiata (1983:82-83) describes how, “under colonialism, the various ethnic groups in Spanish Guinea fared differently. On the island, the Spanish allowed some of the indigenous Bubi to establish themselves in the professions or enter Spanish employment. Few such benefits were extended to the populations of the mainland. This neglect enabled the people of the Rio Muni to remain more immune to the cultural imperialism of the metropole.” Indeed, Fegley (1989:28) argues that “development under Spanish rule was purposely unequal.” He describes how “by the end of World War II, Santa Isabel [modern day Malabo] had become a city of importance [...] Almost half of Fernando Po’s residents lived in Santa Isabel, where schools, hospitals and markets insured a prosperous and secure life for all who co-operated with the Europeans. Far from being ‘death’s waiting room’, the city had become a place of sophistication and comfort.” By contrast, “Río Muni was very different. It had the atmosphere of a frontier town [...] the attitude of the administration was such that the Fang [the dominant ethnic group on the mainland] were isolated from those other Africans who could have aided them in adapting to the new world being [...] Furthermore, few Fang were ever able to gain

access to Spanish patronage and those few who did seldom left the mainland” (Fegley 1989:28). As a result, Fegley (1989:28) explains that “the economies and societies of the mainland and the island were diverging both in terms of structure and complexity.” It was this colonial policy of divide-and-rule that can be seen as a key element in the development of neo-patrimonialism after independence in 1968. This is because there was an existing system of patronage which was enacted by the Spanish to distribute largesse to those favoured by the colonial administration—largely the Bubi on Fernando Po. Additionally, the distinctions between the different ethnic groups (the Bubi and Fernandinos on Fernando Po and the Fang of Río Muni) were heightened, with the Bubi being granted employment and assimilation whilst the Fang of the mainland were largely left untouched. Such a system instilled an ethnic-centric system of patrimonialism. As will be seen in the following section on the rule of Macías Nguema, following independence the Fang were the favoured group due to their dominance and being the ethnic group from which the president came. This resulted in neo-patrimonialism being enacted along ethnic and clan lines. In sum, since colonialism there had been a system in Equatorial Guinea of the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’; such a system was only further entrenched when the bitter Macías came to power, wanting revenge for the neglect suffered under Spanish colonialism. As such, it can be seen that Bratton and van de Walle’s (1994:459) observation that “personal relationships [...] constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions” and that “the interaction between the ‘big man’ and his extended retinue” was beginning to be seen in Equatorial Guinea, even under the Spanish colonial administration. Such a system was merely entrenched and made more extreme under Macías Nguema.

Two further reasons for the Spanish choosing to develop Equatorial Guinea to differing extents was due to the main economic activity being the production of cocoa (largely on Fernando Po) and the administration’s desire to keep the territories’ inhabitants separate for political reasons. Cronje (1976:9) describes how, “at independence, 90 per cent of Equatorial Guinea’s cocoa was produced on Fernando Po [...] The 250,000-strong mainland population, three-quarters of them Fang, therefore had no opportunity of being caught up in the Spanish patronage network.” It

should be remembered that neo-patrimonialism is not enacted for altruistic reasons of giving away financial and other material rewards, but rather to ensure support and obedience to the ‘big man’. Whilst neo-patrimonialism is widely regarded as being a post-independence phenomenon, its earlier incarnation as patronage networks were a key aspect of colonial regimes and Spanish Guinea was no different to Anglophone, Francophone or Lusophone colonial systems in this way. Spain favoured the island of Fernando Po over the mainland Río Muni due to the economic prosperity afforded by it through cocoa production, and therefore centred its patronage network there. There were, of course, positives and negatives to such a policy. Cronje (1976:9) notes that this policy meant that, “the people of Río Muni retained their independence.” This in turn was problematic for the Spanish administration as, “being on the mainland, they were also far more open to the African nationalist influences which swept through the French, Belgian and British colonies after World War II.” As a result, “the majority of the Fang in Río Muni, who had been infected with the more militant nationalism of *alar ayong*, were impatient with Spain’s continued colonial presence” (Cronje 1976:10). Consequently, the Spanish were reluctant to employ the Fang on the cocoa plantations on Fernando Po as “they did not want to import Fang nationalism into Fernando Po for obvious political reasons. By contrast with the mainland, nationalism was slow to take root on the island” (Cronje 1976:11). This enforced difference in the treatment of the ethnic groups only fostered the conditions that would allow for such a system to become entrenched following independence. The Spanish authorities’ favouring of the Bubi and Fernandinos of Fernando Po over the Fang of Río Muni only served to foster anti-Spanish sentiment on the mainland with calls for Spanish withdrawal; this was in contrast to the desire to remain tied to Spain under the colonial system voiced by the population of Fernando Po. As will be seen in the following sections, such a difference in sentiment towards the colonial administration meant that the success of independence was always in doubt. In sum, the unequal colonisation and development undertaken by the Spanish colonial administration meant that conditions were ripe at independence for a system of neo-patrimonialism (which is unequal by its very nature) to take root and develop.

### 3.3.2 Spanish paternalism

Tied to the unequal colonisation and development of Equatorial Guinea was a central colonial policy of paternalism that the Spanish relied upon to keep control. Under this system the Bubi and Fernandinos of Fernando Po were favoured for positions of responsibility by the Spanish, whereas the Fang of the mainland had their movements restricted and were repressed. Fegley (1991:xliv) explains that, “Spanish paternalism had caused untold confusion in the minds of those Africans whose value systems were being transformed. Such attitudes gave rise to inferiority complexes, fixations on Spanish things and undirected resentments toward foreigners. The country was left with severe economic and social cleavages.” Again, as will be seen in the following section on the tenure of Macías Nguema, such a policy only gave rise to further resentment following independence and contributed to the development of a neo-patrimonial system that came to dominate Equatorial Guinea. Indeed, Yates (2012:92) describes how “laws, tribunals, and prisons were conceived to exclude the indigenous populations from any posts of responsibility.” This was particularly the case for the Fang of the mainland territory of Río Muni who were believed to be “unsuited for employment on ‘civilized’ estates” (Cronje 1976:10). In contrast, Yates (2012:92-93) explains that, “because the island capital had been the focus of almost all Spanish assimilation, the Bubi had enjoyed a relatively privileged status during the late colonial period. This changed after decolonization. The formerly unprivileged Fang, by virtue of their numerical preponderance, assumed political power, and thereafter tyrannized the smaller ethnic minorities who inhabited the islands.” It was this neglect of the Fang (the ethnic group of Macías Nguema) that can be attributed to the later privileged position that the group enjoyed under the neo-patrimonial system established by Macías Nguema and the abandonment and abuse suffered by the other ethnic groups: most notably the Bubi. Indeed, Fegley (1989:28) argues that “the paternalism of colonial authorities, plantation owners and priests often clouded the country’s real issues.”

It was the *Patronato de Indígenas* or Native Patronage Organisation, according to Fegley (1989:30), that was “the most important institution of colonial rule in Spanish

Guinea.” Its was originally created with the sole purpose of protecting the Bubi. Although a non-governmental organisation, Fegley (1989:30) describes how it “became almost a government unto itself.” Indeed, “it controlled the lives and futures of Spanish Guineans in ways that neither the trading firms nor the colonial officials were able to. No appeal could be made against it” (Fegley 1989:31). A key aspect of the *Patronato* was emancipation. This was a further way in which the Spanish colonial administration were able to enact divide-and-rule. It is also a central way in which inferiority complexes and anti-Spanish sentiment were generated which further fostered the neo-patrimonial system following independence. Fegley (1989:31) explains that “the colonists divided the population into *emancipados* (assimilated citizens) and *menores* (minors, which included all regarded as primitives).” In fact, the Spanish did intend to assimilate all *menores* before independence, as “the authorities assumed that to be Spanish was the highest goal a being could aspire to” (Fegley 1989:31). It is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of the *menores* were Fang. Fegley (1989:31) explains how, “emancipation was granted to natives with higher education, with salaries over 500 pesetas a year or with posts in the civil service. These restrictions meant that virtually all Fernandinos, many Bubis and Ndowe and almost no Fang were emancipated before the Second World War.” As a result of such a policy, Decalo (1998:58) views Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea as being “oppressive, culturally paternalistic, and suffused with puritanism and middle-class value-biases.” Moreover, he describes how “commencing in 1904, the legal code of the territory was based on the *patronato de indigenas* (‘patronage of the natives’), which made the indigenous population virtual legal minors who could neither sell their lands nor conduct commercial transactions of more than 2,000 pesetas in value. Subject to customary law, rather than to the Spanish colonial code, they were also forced to undertake onerous corve labor on European cocoa plantations in partial payment of their annual taxes” (Decalo 1998:58-59). As such, those holding *menores* status were little more than slaves to the colonial administration. It is therefore unsurprising that in the run-up to independence there was increasing anti-Spanish sentiment displayed by the Fang in particular and that a neo-patrimonial system was created by Macías Nguema in favour of his Fang kinsmen to redistribute the favours that passed them by under Spanish colonialism. Consequently, it is clear

to see that the system of Spanish paternalism was a particularly damaging aspect of their colonial administration. It served to breed deep-rooted resentments which would continue to play out following independence from Spain in 1968.

### **3.3.3 Rapid decolonisation**

As with a significant number of other former colonies on the African continent, the process of decolonisation in Equatorial Guinea happened relatively quickly. As a result, the transition to independence and the assumed democracy that came with it was far from seamless. A central reason for this was the lack of a clear national identity and poor institutions which had not been fully developed. Steele (2005a:486) explains that, “although the constitutional road to independence had taken only eight years, it had started from scratch after many years of political repression, and the roots of the new representative institutions were correspondingly shallow.” It is therefore unsurprising that neo-patrimonialism took root so quickly after independence. After all, as Leftwich (2008:214) makes clear, “it was the development of institutions of rule and governing which were formally separated from not just the rulers but the officials who ran them, on the one hand, and the citizenry, on the other hand, that was central in the shift from what Weber called ‘traditional’ forms of rule and authority, including patrimonial politics, to the modern state.” Therefore, if such institutions were not fully developed at independence, it is not difficult to see how a shift back towards the traditional authority of patrimonialism was able to happen. Indeed, it is possible to see what happened in Equatorial Guinea as a clear example of Chabal and Daloz’s (1999:14) theory of the state as a relatively empty shell. They describe how the state is “*vacuous* in that it did not consolidate, as was expected, on the foundations of the colonial legacy but instead rapidly disintegrated and fell prey to particularistic and factional struggles. It became an empty shell. As a result it failed to acquire either legitimacy or the professional competence which are the hallmarks of the modern state.” Moreover, Fegley (1991:xliv) argues that Equatorial Guinea’s political system was “needlessly complicated for a nation of its size.” As a result, it was perhaps foreseeable that independence was likely to prove problematic.

Although movement towards making Equatorial Guinea independent began as a result of the ‘winds of change’ that blew across the African continent following the end of World War II, there was a lack of a grassroots nationalist movement (Steele, 2005b: 486). This is a point supported by Decalo (1998:67) who notes that, “despite the great degree of fission and fusion in the political scene, a unified nationalist movement never emerged in Equatorial Guinea. The deep schism between the two territorial segments of the colony triggered completely different and mutually antagonistic popular responses to the process of decolonization.” There was, however, Sundiata (1983:83) explains, “increasing pressure from nationalist exiles in neighboring Gabon and Cameroon, and from the United Nations” which called for liberalisation, and “in August 1963, Spain announced its intention of giving the two provinces of Spanish Guinea greater autonomy.” Although the period of autonomy from 1963-68 was seen as a positive move by Spain, “international opinion, especially within the United Nations, demanded a quickened pace for Spanish decolonization [...] the inhabitants of Spanish Guinea wanted and should have independence no later than 1968” (Sundiata 1983:84). Fegley (1989:41) explains that “respectability became a necessity if Madrid was to live down fascism. Furthermore, the Spanish needed to pay at least lip service to decolonization if they were ever to retrieve Gibraltar from the British.” Therefore, Spain agreed to grant independence to Equatorial Guinea in 1968, after a period of ‘provincialisation’. Fegley (1989:44) describes how:

‘Provincialization’ gave a new dimension to the differences between the largely Westernized island and the less developed mainland. Officially, Spanish Guinea was divided into two provinces. This could be interpreted as being one or two colonies. The two had certainly developed separately. Indeed, many Europeans and Africans argued over their status. Many islanders, particularly the Bubi, doubted the wisdom of independence. Few of them were to join the ranks of nationalists. Many of the anti-colonial movement which were being formed had a distinctly Fang character.

Indeed, as has already been alluded to, it was the lack of care taken by Spain to solve the divergent and unequal nature of the two territories within Equatorial Guinea that would, after independence, prove problematic and help to foster the divided nature of the state that would enable neo-patrimonialism to develop so successfully. Fegley (1989:44) succinctly describes how, “by 1960 a colony of two clearly different parts,

culturally, economically and politically, had evolved. Paradoxically, Fernando Po, one of the first places in Africa to see European penetration, was paired with Río Muni, probably the last area on the continent to be fully explored.” The lack of time and energy expended by the Spanish colonial authorities to bridge these differences; instead giving the impression that they had cut-and-run has had a lasting and deeply detrimental impact on Equatorial Guinea, and is a central cause of the resentment that helped to fuel the neo-patrimonial network that Macías Nguema developed following independence in 1968.

The detrimental extent of the rapid decolonisation process is perhaps best illustrated through the events of the Constitutional Conference convened by Spain to decide the devolution of power in October 1967. Decalo (1998:69-70) describes how:

In October 1967, under increasing pressure at the United Nations over its delaying tactics, Spain convened a Constitutional Conference in Madrid to determine the nature of the ultimate devolution of power. Invited to the conference were representatives of all the parties in Equatorial Guinea, including recently formed separationist factions in Fernando Poo. The conference was a stormy and acrimonious one. All the territory’s internal divisions—ethnic, regional, and personal—again came dearly into the open. Utterly deadlocked on all basic issues, the conference had to be adjourned. As one Hispano-Guinean forcefully argued during the session ‘Equatorial Guinea does not [exist] except on paper; it is an artificial creation, in reality two territories.

Such a display suggested, to even a casual observer, that Equatorial Guinea was not fully prepared to be granted independence and therefore the success of such a move could already have been questioned at this time. Moreover, Artucio (1979:4) notes that when the Constitution was eventually agreed upon and drawn up, it was a “progressive, democratic, Western-style Constitution. As a matter of fact, compared with the Constitution then in effect in Spain, it is far more advanced.” The suitability of (fascist) Spain introducing democracy to one of its dependencies will be examined more closely in the next section, but it is clear that the Constitution was not necessarily suitable to a state in the embryonic stages of ‘democracy’, and therefore the fact that it quickly failed and was hijacked by Macías Nguema to be replaced by his own ‘personalised’ Constitution is again unsurprising.

The system of *patronato de indigenas* detailed in the preceding section also emphasises the unsuitability for the rapid speed at which decolonisation was enacted. By excluding the indigenous peoples from positions of responsibility and authority for so long, it meant that when the time came for them to take up such positions they did not have the qualifications or experience. It is therefore par for the course that institutionalisation would not be successfully developed, because there was a lack of experience and preparation achieved by those newly-promoted to positions of responsibility. Such a situation was only made worse by the election of Macías Nguema and his expelling and destruction of the Spanish and Equatorial Guinean intellectuals, as will be further explored later in this chapter. Indeed, Chabal and Daloz's (1999) 'political instrumentalization of disorder' should be kept in mind. This is the idea that the state is "*ineffectual* in that it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper institutionalization of the state apparatus. Or to put it another way, its usefulness is greatest when it is least institutionalized" (Chabal and Daloz 1999:14). The lack of development and institutionalisation of the bureaucracy and judiciary in particular was seized upon by Macías Nguema to be adapted to serve his own purposes of self-enrichment and support through a neo-patrimonial network, as will be explored in more detail later. This was one of several elements that indicated that the rapid speed with which decolonisation was enacted in Equatorial Guinea was detrimental to the success of independence. Furthermore, it provided the conditions that allowed a system of neo-patrimonialism to take root and develop as the weakness of institutions is a key factor for the success of such a network being established.

### **3.3.4 Spanish fascism at home**

As has already been alluded to earlier in this chapter, a further element of the Spanish colonial legacy that contributed to the conditions that allowed a system of neo-patrimonialism to develop in Equatorial Guinea following independence, was the fascist nature of the Franco regime in Spain that oversaw its colonies, including Equatorial Guinea. Ghazvinian (2007:171) believes that a central reason for the course that Equatorial Guinea took following independence, in particular the highly-

personalised regime of Macías Nguema, was because of the political regime that the state had been exposed to by its colonial master. “Perhaps most important, Equatorial Guinea’s independence came when Spain was still an international pariah ruled by Generalissimo Francisco Franco and his fascist Falange party. For years, the only European political philosophy to which the territory’s elites and civil servants had been exposed was authoritarianism.” Moreover, Decalo (1998:58) notes that “among all the modern colonizations in Africa, it appears that one can give the Spaniards the record for police vigilance, even if there are other serious contenders in this domain.” It is therefore understandable that a highly personalised regime based on corruption and terror came to dominate in Equatorial Guinea under Macías Nguema for the first eleven years post-independence. Roberts (2006:19) also sees the Franco regime as being responsible for the failure of democracy and institutionalisation and the resultant rise of neo-patrimonialism; in part because of rapid decolonisation: “When independence loomed, the Spanish organised hasty polls to find a new government. Spain, under its own dictator General Franco, was hardly qualified to promote democracy and Equatorial Guinea was ill-prepared when, later in 1968, it became the 126<sup>th</sup> member of the United Nations.” Such an opinion is shared by Steele (2005b: 486) who notes how, “the comparatively rapid advance of Equatorial Guinea [...] to independence, after many years of authoritarian rule under Franco’s Spain [...] facilitated the emergence of a leader, Francisco Macías Nguema [...] whose record of repression and violations of basic human rights was matched only by those of Idi Amin and the “emperor” Bokassa.” Indeed, the fact that its colonial master was not a democracy itself, meant that the chances of democracy taking root and developing successfully in Equatorial Guinea was in doubt from inception. This is a point which is supported by Sundiata (1990:55):

Spain [...] envisioned the creation of a new government more democratic than the metropolitan regime [...] In retrospect, much of the constitution-making of the 1960s appears to have been an exercise in futility. The hastily conceived constitution was alien to the colonial power that retired from Equatorial Guinea in 1968. It was equally alien to the political realities that governed the lives of the majority of the new nation’s citizens.

It is therefore unsurprising that Macías Nguema so easily managed to abolish it and introduce his neo-patrimonial system dominated by personal rule and terror campaigns. The repression enacted on Equatorial Guinea under the colonial rule of Franco's Spain had a lasting effect on the politics of the state after independence. Having only known authoritarian rule, characterised by a strict terror network, it is not particularly shocking that such a regime would be emulated by Macías Nguema when he came to power in 1968: it is to his terror-dominated rule that our attention now turns.

### **3.4 THE MADNESS OF MACÍAS: THE RULE OF MACÍAS NGUEMA 1968-1979**

Equatorial Guinea became an independent state on 12 October 1968. Finally shedding its colonial shackles, there were great hopes of a prosperous future. Fegley (1991:xliv) notes that “Fernando Po’s per capita GNP was US\$466, by far the highest in black Africa. Río Muni was not nearly as prosperous. Nevertheless, the per capita GNP for the entire country climbed to US\$300 by independence. The literacy rate was 89% and energy consumption was the fourth highest in black Africa. In 1960 the colony’s per capita export index was the highest in Africa at US\$135 (Ghana’s was \$48 and South Africa’s \$87).” These figures are impressive, particularly when the comparatively small land area and population of Equatorial Guinea is considered. Similarly, Clarke (2010:137) explains that, “despite earlier neglect, Spain put major effort into development in the 1960s.” Although, the statistics suggest that Equatorial Guinea was indeed on the brink of prosperity, Clarke (2010:137) stresses that “all of this was before Macias took the helm.” Moreover, the detrimental impact that Macías Nguema had on the newly-independent Equatorial Guinea and the rapidity with which any hopes were dashed is hinted at by Ghazvinian (2007:171): “Franco, hoping to demonstrate his bona fides to the world, ensured that a free and fair election took place in Malabo, the only democratic election he ever organized. There was only one problem: The wrong man won.”

Francisco Macías Nguema was born in 1924 in Mongomo, on the mainland. A member of the Fang and the son of a witch doctor; it will become apparent that these small facts had a central bearing on how Macías behaved once he was elected as President in 1968. Ghazvinian (2007:171) describes how Nguema, “a former court translator, a paranoid schizophrenic sociopath, and the uncle of Equatorial Guinea’s current president, quickly declared himself ‘President for Life’ and, for good measure, ‘Immaculate Apostle of Steel’ and ‘Unique Miracle of Equatorial Guinea,’ among other titles. The cinematic depravity of his regime was rivaled only by the likes of Uganda’s Idi Amin.” The only miracle that could really be associated with Macías is that Equatorial Guinea still existed at the end of his tenure; although only just. Roberts (2006:20) details how, “after independence things really went wrong. Its citizens were soon desperate to escape.” He continues by noting that, “Macias’ reign was tragi-comic — and sadly typical of the worst of African leaders. He seemed to compete with Idi Amin of Uganda in acts of bizarre brutality.” The disastrous effect of Macías Nguema’s rule in Equatorial Guinea is summed up by Meredith (2006:238-39) when he describes how, “Equatorial Guinea enjoyed only 145 days of independence before it was pitched into a nightmare of brutality and coercion that lasted for eleven years [...] Equatorial Guinea steadily sank into a morass of murder and mayhem.” It is undeniable that Macías Nguema had a detrimental effect on the newly-independent Equatorial Guinea during his eleven years in power. This section will detail the key aspects of his presidency and how they illustrate and contributed towards the development of the system of neo-patrimonialism that has come to characterise politics in Equatorial Guinea since independence. These central features are: (1) Macías’ inferiority complex and anti-Spanish sentiment; (2) the personalisation of power and plunder of state resources and; (3) Macías’ terror campaign and mental (in) capacity. It is to these aspects that our attention will now be focused.

### **3.4.1 Macías’ inferiority complex and anti-Spanish sentiment**

As has been briefly commented upon in the preceding sections, the Spanish colonial policies which favoured the Bubi and Fernandino ethnic groups of Fernando Po over the Fang of Río Muni helped to instil an inferiority complex in the Fang; no more so than in the newly-elected president, Macías Nguema. Under colonial rule, Macías had

been rapidly promoted (many believed far beyond his intellectual capabilities) and Fegley (1989:49) notes that, “he was highly regarded by the colonialists and his rewards were correspondingly high.” Furthermore, Fegley (1989:57) describes how upon his being elected, “the Spanish undoubtedly felt comfortable with Macías, even if he wasn’t their first choice. Remembering his past, they saw him as an easy target for future influence. Little did they know of the xenophobia and megalomania which had built up in their little interpreter from Mongomo.” The lasting effect that the Spanish treatment had on the Fang was to, in turn, have a lasting effect on Equatorial Guinea as a whole. Meredith (2006:239) details the detrimental impact that the Spanish policy had on Macías:

A politician of limited education and low mental ability, Nguema had made his way up the ladder as a result of the support of Spanish administrators who believed he could be turned into a trustworthy collaborator relied upon to do their bidding [...] But while being groomed for office by the Spanish, Nguema harboured intense resentments against them and an abiding hatred of foreign culture and ‘intellectuals’ in general. Once in power, he lashed out.

It soon became apparent after he came to power, that Macías resented the Spanish and those ethnic groups that had gained preferential treatment under the colonial administration; notably the Bubi and Fernandinos of Fernando Po. As a result he embarked on a campaign to bolster the Fang to the majority of positions of authority and personalise power with a close ring of kinsmen around him. This, a key element in the development of neo-patrimonialism, will be looked at in closer detail in the next section. Roberts (2006:22) describes how, “Macias — like Pol Pot in Cambodia — launched a campaign against the educated and they began to ‘disappear’. He banned the word ‘intellectual’, once firing a minister who used it at a cabinet meeting. He called educated people the ‘greatest problem facing Africa today. They are polluting our climate with foreign culture’.” Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2009:7) describes the Macías regime as being “virulently anti-intellectual.” Fegley (1989:69) highlights the point that, “the elimination of opponents and sometimes even large sections of the educated elite was not unknown in Africa. However, the difference between Macías’s reign of terror and what happened in, for example, Bokassa’s Central African Empire was the totality of the program.” Indeed, as will become

apparent in the sections on Macías' personalisation of power and the terror campaign that came with it, once Macías had eliminated his Spanish and non-Fang 'opponents' his terror and murder net was simply thrown wider until only a small ring of henchmen surrounded him in the dying days of his regime.

What needs to be considered is that under a system of neo-patrimonialism, power is seen as zero sum. Therefore, no competition or opponents can be tolerated. Bavister-Gould (2011:1-2) highlights two particular elements that are seen by proponents of such a regime. These are: a ruthless application of coercion and repression to gain and especially maintain power and; the use of often considerable brutality and exclusion as the means for punishing opponents and competitors. Macías Nguema was quick to employ such methods to ensure that his presidency went unchallenged and as will be seen through the remainder of this chapter, as he became more and more desperate to cling to power, the methods that he and his security apparatus employed became more and more brutal. Zeleza and Eyoh (2003:202) note that in 1969, soon after gaining power, Macías Nguema "banned opposition parties, constrained the free press, and forced out most of the 7,000-strong Spanish community." Fegley (1991:xliv) describes how, "in a series of violent speeches at the beginning of 1969, the President encouraged anti-Spanish feelings. He demanded the number of flags flying over Spanish diplomatic missions in the country should be reduced. The Spanish ambassador refused." The events that followed led to what Cronje (1976:22) described as "a mass exodus of Spaniards." Similarly, Arnold (2005:371) notes that "anti-white demonstrations and incidents led to an exodus of Spanish residents and this, in turn, led to a near collapse of the economy." The extent and severity of events is summarised by Sundiata (1983:88) who explains that Fang nationalism and Macías' "obviously unfolding designs of personal rule" meant that opposition elements (most notably Spaniards and Bubis) needed to be eliminated:

Barely four months after independence, which had been superficially smooth, a grave crisis arose that signaled the total removal of all the obstacles in Macias's way. To counter the Bubi-Spanish alliance, Macias had brought over some 7000 Fang to the capital Santa Isabel (the present Malabo). He demanded that Spain remove its remaining garrisons from the new state and persisted in anti-Spanish speeches. While an exodus of Spaniards began, Foreign

Minister Atanasio Ndongo and the Equatorial delegate to the United Nations, Saturino Ibongo, were asked by Spanish officials to stop inflammatory broadcasts. After Macías refused to heed them, the two attempted a coup. Ndongo briefly took over the presidency, but was soon routed. He and Ibongo were captured. The followers of the ill-fated *putsch* fled to the forest, while the president ordered the arrest of a number of political leaders.

Such events heralded a quickening of Macías Nguema's personalisation of power. Determined to eliminate all opposition to his rule, and having expelled all Spaniards and other foreign influences, he focused on transforming the political structures of Equatorial Guinea into his family business, to carry out his personal wishes and entrench his planned system of neo-patrimonialism. It is these events that the next section will be concerned with.

### **3.4.2 The personalisation of power and plunder of state resources**

According to Bratton and van de Walle (1997:62), “the right to rule in neopatrimonial regimes is ascribed to a person rather than to an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. One individual [...] often a president for life, dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws.” Such a situation is what became apparent in Equatorial Guinea as Macías Nguema sought to personalise power and surround himself with a close circle of trusted kinsmen: quickly the state began to be run as his personal fiefdom. Mengisteab (2008:42-43) argues that along with Mobutu (Zaire), Idi Amin (Uganda), Bokassa (Central African Republic), Mengistu (Ethiopia), Abacha (Nigeria) and Taylor (Liberia); Macías Nguema of Equatorial Guinea “essentially privatized the state and used its coffers as [...] his] private bank account and its security forces as [...] private armies.” It was the archetypal ‘vampire’ state (Mengisteab 2008:43). Indeed, the practice of politics under Macías Nguema fitted with the following description of neo-patrimonialism provided by Thomson (2010:110): “legal-rational institutions did not prosper in Africa after independence [...] Power was removed from civil society and peripheral institutions of the state, and hoarded instead within the core executive, often with just one individual being dominant.” As we shall see, this is an exemplary explanation of how politics came to be practiced in Equatorial Guinea under Macías Nguema. Indeed, Jackson and Rosberg (1982:246) note that, “it was reported upon assuming power, the Macías government installed

7,000 of its Fang supporters in government positions [...] Clearly the new government was not to be a Guinean government so much as a Fang government.” As a result, Meredith (2006:240) reports that: “no proper administration survived. The only people to be paid regularly were the president, the army, the police and the militia. Most ministries — including those dealing with education, agriculture, construction and natural resources — had no budgets at all and their offices in Malabo were shut. The central bank too was closed after the director was publicly executed in 1976. All foreign exchange was delivered instead to Nguema who hoarded it along with large amounts of local currency in his various palaces on Fernando Po and Rio Muni.” Roberts (2006:23) describes how, “when he ran short of money Macias took hostages [...] He collected a generous ransom of nearly \$60,000 for a German woman [...] In 1976 a Soviet plane crashed into a mountain near Malabo, killing all on board. Macias refused to release any bodies until compensation of \$5 million was paid for ‘damage to the mountain’.” Over the course of his eleven years in power, Equatorial Guinea went from a prosperous country, to one on the brink of disaster. According to Klitgaard (1991:20) “the reason for the horrible decline was the havoc wrought by the dictator Francisco Macías Nguema.” He continues by describing how:

With Macías’s political sins had come economic decline. Some forty thousand Nigerians, who labored on cocoa plantations on the island, left the country in 1976 and 1977, after increasingly brutal treatment. Cocoa production dropped from thirty thousand tons in the last years of Spanish rule to about five thousand tons in the late 1970s. Coffee and timber exports fell to less than a tenth of their former levels (Klitgaard 1991:20).

Indeed, Woods (2004:548) argues that Macías Nguema alone can be blamed for the rapid and avoidable decline suffered by Equatorial Guinea in his eleven years in power following the granting of independence in 1968. He attributes the sorry state of affairs to Macías Nguema’s increasingly personalised rule and system of neo-patrimonialism:

In March 1969, an abortive coup was alleged to have taken place. Macias used this as an excuse to mount an extensive purge of both traditional leaders and qualified cadres; all political parties were fused into a United National Party. The constitution was suspended, with Macias assuming dictatorial powers.

Macias neglected all functions of government other than internal security; almost all formal education ground to a halt, with most of the population being forced to revert to subsistence agriculture. The expulsion of most Nigerian contract workers and Spanish expatriates led to a 90 percent drop in GNP. At the close of his reign, one-third of the population had been killed or exiled.

It was the abandonment of the 1968 Constitution (devised at the pre-independence conference) by Macías Nguema and a new Constitution which introduced ever-increasing presidential powers that served as the pinnacle of the personalisation of his power. Fegley (1991:xlvi) describes how, “as a result of the crises of March 1969, Macías declared that the 1968 Constitution had serious defects. He was able to completely sweep it away with a series of decrees. In May 1971, Legislative Decree no. 415 repealed a number of articles in the Constitution and promulgated a decree allowing the President to dissolve the *Asamblea* at his pleasure. Provisions relating to elections and the removal of the President from office were repealed and a council with purely advisory functions was established.” Furthermore, Cronje (1976:14) notes that, “the next landmark in Macias’ drive for absolute power was reached on 14 July 1972 when decree 1/72 proclaimed him President for Life, Head of the Nation and Party, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Grand Master of Education, Science and Culture.” With this legislation, Macías’ personalisation of power was complete and a system of neo-patrimonialism formally established. Indeed, Fegley (1991:xlvi) explains that, “Macías gradually assumed all legislative, executive, judicial and military powers. His ability to do this lay not only in his own cunning, but also in the lack of any mass political consciousness within Equatorial Guinean society.” Similarly, Zeleza and Eyoh (2003:202) describe how Macías Nguema “initiated a regime whose brutality and megalomania rivaled that of Idi Amin in Uganda and Bokassa in the Central African Republic. Power was effectively controlled by Nguema, members of his immediate family, and kinfolk from his Esangui clan, and it was maintained through the officially sanctioned murder of thousands of suspected opponents.” As will become clear in the following section on the terror network that Macías put in place, any political consciousness that had been possessed by the populace was rapidly beaten out of it!

A further aspect of neo-patrimonial rule is the cultivation of a cult of personality and this is an unavoidably prominent aspect of Macías Nguema's presidency. As has already been mentioned, Macías introduced increasingly imaginative, (comic), and excessive titles for himself—rivalling only Idi Amin's 'Last King of Scotland' and Jean-Bedel Bokassa's 'Emperor'. Zeleza and Eyoh (2003:202) explain that, "Equatorial Guinea's post-independence history was defined by the mind-numbing tragic excesses of personal dictatorship." Such excesses are described by Shaxson, who declares that, "Equatorial Guinea fell under the spell of a poorly educated man [...] a violent, stick-thin despot who descended into paranoid madness and called himself the Great Sorcerer, whom nobody could touch [...] An African Caligula, Macias proclaimed himself God's 'Unique Miracle'." Before closing all Catholic churches, Macías Nguema insisted that Church services were dominated by his cult of personality rather than religious teachings. Sundiata (1983:93) details that:

Macias sought not only to disestablish the colonial religious order but to create a new one centering on himself. The new 'cult of personality' could contain elements of the discredited colonial faith. The head of state was proclaimed the 'sole miracle' of Equatorial Guinea. Church services were made to include sycophantic adulation of the President for Life. Political rhetoric evoked the image of the leader as a miraculous figure, eclipsing the discredited roster of Roman Catholic saints.

Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2009:7) describes how: "the government claimed, 'There is no other God than Macías,' and the phrase 'God created Equatorial Guinea thanks to Macías—Without Macías Equatorial Guinea would not exist' became a mandatory part of all church services." Moreover, Roberts (2006:22) details that, "he [Macias] ordered teachers and priests to promote his cult of personality. School children chanted that Macias alone had freed the country from imperial Spanish rule. The sanctuary of every church was to show his portrait. Priests read out messages venerating the insecure president." The fact that the state still existed when Macías Nguema was deposed in a military-led coup d'état in 1979 is the only miracle of Equatorial Guinea!

### 3.4.3 Macias' terror campaign and mental (in)capacity

Amnesty International labelled Equatorial Guinea under Macías Nguema as “an immense field of torture, from which the only exit is the cemetery” (quoted in Shaxson 2008:34). Pélissier (1980:13) describes how, “by the spring of 1979, Equatorial Guinea was rapidly plunging into a closeted nightmare that called to mind Cambodia minus political philosophy.” Moreover, Ghazvinian (2007:172) notes that, “during the Macias years, anywhere from one-third to one-half of Equatorial Guinea’s population either died or fled the country, as it became known in diplomatic circles as ‘Africa’s concentration camp’.” Macías waged a campaign of terror for the duration of his presidency and as will be seen, it was his ultimate downfall too, as his terror network eventually turned in on itself. Roberts (2006:20) describes how, “a bloodthirsty and insecure tyrant, Macias assassinated ministers with zeal,” and “diplomats said Macias ruled through fear alone.” Indeed, the excessive terror network that Macías Nguema established was the only way in which he could remain in power for as long as he did. Eventually there was no opposition left for Macías to eliminate, so he instead began to turn on his own henchmen: this was, ultimately, to lead to his own death. The preceding sections have briefly mentioned the violent repression that Macías Nguema came to rely on in order to keep control; this factor will now be examined in greater detail in order to show how it supported the growing neo-patrimonial system that Macías Nguema established in Equatorial Guinea.

According to Jackson and Rosberg (1982:244):

Two unequivocal cases of tyranny emerged in sub-Saharan Africa since independence—in Equatorial Guinea and Uganda. In both, tyranny grew out of despotic situations in which power was used to persecute heretofore privileged political minorities, but deteriorated quickly into general oppressions in which seemingly no individual or group could feel completely safe. In both, eventually everyone became a candidate for victimization—even collaborators or relatives of the rulers; for everyone—not least the ruler and his agent—survival became a contingency of life governed solely by power, influence, or fortune.

As has already been mentioned, the use of coercion and repression along with brutality and exclusion are central characteristics of ‘predatory’ rule according to

Bavister-Gould (2011:1-2). Such methods were characteristic of Macías Nguema's presidency. Indeed, Jackson and Rosberg (1982:246) argue that "the crucial event in Equatorial Guinea which set in motion what we have called the vicious circle of tyranny was the violent overreaction of Macías and his followers to the 1969 coup attempt. Had Macías been a confident and responsible ruler, he would have arrested and punished the plotters—as many other African rulers have done—without resorting to widespread killing and terror." Instead, Fegley (1991:xlvi) describes how, "executions abounded. Often the entire population of an area would be herded together to hear a trial. 'Defence' lawyers would plead for mercy rather than offer a defence and the inevitable death sentence would be carried out in the form of a public spectacle." A particularly brutal chronicle of events is provided by Roberts (2006:21):

At one Christmas mass execution in a sports stadium in the capital, Malabo, palace guards shot 150 victims while music blared. The song: 'Those Were the Days, My Friend'. Other executions took place in the notorious Black Beach prison, usually at night. When it became expensive to use bullets, victims were garroted or forced to kneel to have their skulls smashed with iron bars. Some died of thirst; others were buried alive or died from gangrene following torture. To spread terror, some were beheaded, their heads left on poles in the streets. Emigrés were kidnapped and dragged home to be killed. Many who survived prison were driven insane.

There was no shortage of victims of Macías Nguema's terror campaign. Fegley (1991:xlvi) notes that under the president's changes to the constitution, Law No. 1 was introduced. This "provided death as the penalty for 'rebellion' and 'offences against territorial integrity' and for any person who threatens, kills or attempts to kill the President or who deprives him of his personal freedom or uses violence or serious intimidation to force him to perform an act against his will." Cronje (1976:15) makes an important point when she writes that "violence and repression have a long history in Equatorial Guinea, owing much to the nature of Spanish colonial rule. But since independence in 1968, and especially since President Macias' assumption of increasing personal power since 1970, legalised oppression and political murder have become commonplace instruments of government policy." Indeed, it should be noted that Spain was a particularly repressive colonial administration. However, Cronje (1976:13) also emphasises that "although Spanish rule undoubtedly set a particularly

brutal example of undemocratic government, Spain itself is not directly responsible for the reign of terror [...] by which President Macias runs the country.” This is true; however, it is also vital to acknowledge that a number of the policy decisions taken by Macías Nguema whilst he was in power were as a direct result of the way that colonial policy was enacted by the Spanish.

The key terror organisation in Equatorial Guinea under Macías Nguema was the *Juventud en Marcha con Macías* (JMM)—translated as ‘Youth on the March with Macías—a paramilitary organisation comprised of people aged 7-30 (Fegley, 1989:67). According to Fegley (1989:67-68), the JMM was “created on February 22, 1969 [... it] became an internal security force under a kinsman of Macías named Rafael Obiang N’Zogo after it was institutionalized on February 12, 1970. The organization was given power to harass anyone outside of the highest levels of government and Macías’ own clan, the Esangui of Mongomo.” And “assassinations quickly became a way of life, as the JMM freely roamed the country.” Fegley (1989:70) goes on to explain that, “by 1970 the country had three security forces (the *Guardia Nacional*, the JMM and the *Milicia*). Pitted against each other as well as against ‘enemies’ of the state, these organizations maintained a constant vigil over the country.” Moreover, Decalo (1998:92) explains that “the officer corps, like the upper echelons of the civil service, were linked to Nguema by ties of blood and kinship, and personally beholden to him for their well-being and even physical survival.” Indeed, Medard (1982:173) notes that by the end of his presidency, Macías’ “entourage was practically reduced to his own family from the village of Mongomo.” The personalised nature of the security services is also emphasised by Fegley (1989:153); “Macías headed the ministries of defense, national security and trade himself. The security forces and JMM mixed and mingled until any separate functions they may have had became hopelessly muddled. They operated, sometimes barely controlled, as bands of extortionists.” The efficiency of the security forces could not be questioned, as Sundiata (1990:2) reports that “in the eleven years of his [Macías’] rule, 1968 through 1979, at least a third of the population was killed.” According to Artucio (1979:6) the JMM was the most dangerous force operating: “the worst forms of political repression are attributable to the Youth on the March with Macías. It was

responsible for most of the atrocities, including killings, executions, torture, burning of villages and lootings. They informed on anyone, resorted to violence as a line of conduct and generally aimed at terrorising the population.” Sundiata (1988:26) also stresses that rewards also motivated the system as well as repression. He writes that, “in the system established after 1969, the agents of terror (e.g., *Juventud en Marcha con Macias*) were able to both repress insular dissent and plunder the insular economy.” It is, however, key to note that, “of course, as the economy collapsed, the need for repression increased and the agents of terror began to see diminishing returns [...] the regime was not able to expand the area plundered. Terror was also difficult to delimit. It was on this rock, and not on the application of terror, per se, that the regime ultimately foundered” (Sundiata 1988:26). As has already been mentioned, it was the very terror network that Macías Nguema established to protect himself that was to be responsible for his ultimate downfall and death. Fegley (1989:71) makes a valid point: “of course, anyone who creates such a system must also spend a great deal of time looking over their own shoulder. Such was certainly the case with Macías.” Sundiata (1988:27) explains that:

When the regime collapsed, it did not do so because of external pressures. Macias Nguema was overthrown in a palace coup organized by his own subalterns [...] by the Spring of 1979 terror in Equatorial Guinea had come to include members of the president’s circle itself. He had members of his bodyguard, who were reportedly members of his own clan, executed. In June of 1979 Macias struck at his inner circle by liquidating five military officers, one of whom was the brother of his successor, Lieutenant Colonel Obiang Nguema Mbasango. It may have been evident to Obiang Mbasango, as well as to other members of the president’s entourage, that the apparatus of terror was being devoured by its own agents. If the apparatus has been ‘functional’ in 1969, it was definitely dysfunctional ten years later. Those benefitting from the terror had diminished to almost a minority of one.

And so it was that Lieutenant Colonel Obiang Nguema Mbasango led a military coup d’état that ousted President Macías Nguema from power. He was captured after fleeing his bunker in Mongomo in August 1979 with two suitcases stuffed full of foreign currency (the entirety of the country’s foreign reserves) (Meredith, 2006:243). Baynham (1986:30) reports the following pitiful statistics:

President Nguema's 11 years of rule had resulted in between 35 000 and 50 000 deaths, with at least one-quarter of the country's 350 000 estimated population in exile. Exiles in Madrid claim that Nguema was responsible for as many as 80 000 deaths. According to political refugees in Madrid, Yaounde and Libreville, Equatorial Guinea's professional and administrative class had been almost entirely eradicated. Only two doctors remained in the country, one of whom, a psychiatrist, was employed to treat Nguema for an assortment of mental disorders.

The extent of Macías Nguema's terror network and its 'success' is evident in the fact that he managed to kill at least 21 of his cabinet ministers (Shaxson 2008:33). Perhaps the greatest indication of the terrible extent of Macías Nguema's terror network and how much he himself was feared is seen in that "his execution had to be carried out by élite Moroccan troops after Equatorial Guinean soldiers refused to involve themselves. He swore his ghost would return to haunt those who had condemned him to death" (Fegley 1991:li). It is therefore unsurprising that Decalo (1998:13) argues that Macías Nguema's Equatorial Guinea, Amin's Uganda and Bokassa's Central African Republic, "stand out starkly, by virtue of their sheer brutality and the highly arbitrary nature of their dictatorial rule." It is through such an excessive and all-encompassing terror network that it is possible to see that Macías Nguema's presidency stands out as a clear example of Bavister-Gould's (2011) definition of a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime.

### **3.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This chapter has provided an overview of the history of Equatorial Guinea from Spanish colonialism through decolonisation and the first eleven years of independence under the presidency of Macías Nguema. It has shown that under Spanish colonialism conditions were ripe for the future development of a system of neo-patrimonialism as the colonial administration practiced a policy of divide-and-rule favouring the Bubi, and to a lesser extent, the Fernandino on the island of Fernando Po, whilst neglecting the Fang of the mainland territory of Río Muni. The analysis of the presidency of Macías Nguema highlights the detrimental effect that such a policy had on the newly-independent Equatorial Guinea. The inferiority complex and anti-Spanish sentiment that was instilled in Macías Nguema by the policy of emancipation had a direct

bearing on the treatment and terror that he enacted once he became president in 1968. Furthermore, the relatively rapid rate at which the process of decolonisation was carried out, meant that—coupled with the unequal levels of colonisation and development that the Spanish had performed in the different territories of Equatorial Guinea—the two principal regions of Fernando Po and Río Muni were not adequately unified, which only served to cause heightened troubles once Macías Nguema came to power. Furthermore, the institutions that did exist were not fully developed and therefore easily fell victim to nepotism and corruption following independence. Additionally, having been colonised by Franco's Spain—characterised by a fascist, authoritarian system of government—it is unsurprising that democracy did not take hold in Equatorial Guinea. After all, as Sundiata (1990:55) emphasises, “the hastily conceived constitution was alien to the colonial power that retired from Equatorial Guinea in 1968. It was equally alien to the political realities that governed the lives of the majority of the new nation's citizens.” A similar point is made by Ghazvinian (2007:171) who notes that the democratic elections held for Equatorial Guinea's independence were the only democratic elections that Franco ever organised.

Although Spanish colonialism had laid the foundations for a system of neo-patrimonialism being established in Equatorial Guinea following independence, it was Macías Nguema as the first post-independence president that truly developed such a regime. Soon after becoming president he purged the country of Spanish presence and influence and sought to eliminate the rival Bubi and Fernandino ethnic groups, favouring his own Fang tribe. He practiced nepotism by filling the majority of government positions with members of the Fang; regardless of whether they were adequately qualified for the role. Indeed, Jackson and Rosberg (1982:242) argue that it was a Fang government, rather than one representative of Equatorial Guinea as a whole. Over the course of his presidency, Macías Nguema increasingly personalised his rule, surrounding himself with a small circle of loyal kinsmen drawn either from his family or Esangui clan. As such he conducted a regime which fits with Bavister-Gould's (2011) definition of ‘predatory’ rule. The fact that by the end of his rule, at least 35 000 people had been killed and a further quarter of the population were in exile bears testament to the efficient and ruthless terror network that he created,

particularly in the form of the JMM. Anyone who fell outside of his clan was targeted. It was, however, the terror network that was to prove Macías Nguema's final downfall. It was so ruthless that even its creator was not immune from its violent clutches. Having begun to target his own loyal supporters, Macías Nguema was deposed in a coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Obiang Nguema Mbasango in August 1979. Initially promising a rupture from the old order, Obiang Nguema has now been in charge of Equatorial Guinea for over 30 years. His increasingly ruthless methods to prop up his excessive neo-patrimonial regime are to be examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ENTRENCHMENT OF NEO-PATRIMONIALISM IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA: THE PRESIDENCY OF OBIANG NGUEMA AND THE DISCOVERY OF OIL

*“Although the head of the snake has been cut off, Equatorial Guinea is still left with  
the same snake.”*  
*Africa Confidential.*

*“It is hard to think of many African despots who make Robert Mugabe seem stable  
and benign, but Teodoro Obiang Nguema is one who does.”*  
Steve Bloomfield, *The Independent on Sunday.*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Chapter three provided a firm basis of the development of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea under the first post-independence president, Macías Nguema. Whilst it is clear that the regime of Macías served to decimate Equatorial Guinea beyond recognition from the promising future that lay ahead of the country at the time of independence from Spain in 1968 (Wornoff 1988:vii), this chapter will show how any great hopes for a significant change in fortunes after Macías was overthrown in the 1979 coup by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, were soon dashed. Indeed, Fegley (1989:231) argues that, “if Equatorial Guinea had turned over a new leaf [with the replacement of Macías with Obiang], it is still on the same branch as the old. Obiang retains the final word.” A similar image is evoked by Decalo (1998:99) who notes that “the clothes of the emperor may be different, but the modality of rule—personal dictatorship—is very much intact in Malabo.” This chapter will trace the entrenchment of neo-patrimonialism under Obiang Nguema (who with the deposing of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya became the longest serving president of an African nation—at the time of writing; 34 years) (Human Rights Watch 2012:1). Initially the first fifteen years or so of Obiang’s presidency will be examined to show how despite inheriting a state and economy in tatters, Obiang and his inner circle of elites still managed to enact an extensive policy of neo-patrimonialism. The effects of the discovery of oil in 1996 will dominate the remainder of the chapter. The vast oil

wealth that has accrued to Equatorial Guinea since, giving it the highest GDP per capita in Africa and one outstripping many nations of the developed world—including New Zealand, Italy and South Korea (Open Society Justice Initiative 2010:4)—has not benefitted the majority who continue to “sail in a sea of misery” (Abaga quoted in Shaxson 2008:122). As will become apparent, the astronomical gap between GDP per capita growth and HDI ranking—93 places, making it the country with the biggest negative difference (Shaxson 2008:142)—is widely attributable to the extensive neo-patrimonial system in operation. The impact of this system on Equatorial Guinea will be illustrated in the remainder of this chapter through a description and explanation of the following factors: the resource curse, the Riggs banking scandal, the profligate spending of the President’s son (and widely-touted heir apparent) Teodorín Nguema, international relations (most notably with the US and China). Finally, in part as an attempt to predict what future lies ahead for Equatorial Guinea, various drives to control corruption and introduce transparency initiatives will be examined to see how neo-patrimonialism will continue to liquidate the state if extensive action to curb it is not taken. Overall, this chapter will provide a clear picture of how neo-patrimonialism has become entrenched in Equatorial Guinea to the extent that it is the most fitting explanation for the state’s current condition and is an archetypal example of Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) theory of the ‘political instrumentalization of disorder.’

#### **4.2 THE EMPEROR’S NEW CLOTHES(?): THE EARLY YEARS UNDER OBIANG NGUEMA 1979-1996**

Teodoro Obiang Nguema has been president of Equatorial Guinea since he overthrew Macías Nguema (his uncle) in the 1979 coup d’état (Williams 2011:623). As was detailed in the previous chapter on Macías’ rule, by the time he was deposed, “one-third of the population had been killed or exiled” (Woods 2004:548). It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that Obiang has described himself as “Liberator of the People” (Shaxson 2008:35). Such praise for his regime, however, is not forthcoming from Equatorial Guineans outside of his inner circle of kinsmen and cronies. Indeed, Yates (2012:94) describes how:

Since 1979, Obiang Nguema and his military junta have run one of the most despotic tyrannies on the African continent. Although it seems hard to believe that anything could have been worse than his uncle Macías' reign of terror, keep in mind that Obiang had been the head of state security under the old regime, and continued its bloody policies once he took power himself.

Whilst Shaxson (2008:123) argues that "Obiang was not as brutal as his bloodthirsty uncle Macías," Woods (2004:547) highlights the fact that he is "regularly named as one of the worst despots in the world." Indeed, Bloomfield (2007) goes so far as to say that, "it is hard to think of many African despots who make Robert Mugabe seem stable and benign, but Teodoro Obiang Nguema is one who does." As a result it is already clear to see that Obiang's presidency represented a mere continuation of the previous regime, rather than the rupture that was hoped for shortly after he took power. Decalo (1998:103) goes so far as to contend that, "a definitive postmortem of dictatorship in Equatorial Guinea is not yet possible. Tyranny still reigns supreme in the Malabo of 1998 as it did twenty years ago." Indeed, the presidency of Obiang has come to be dominated by the same loathsome features as Macías': (i) constitutional adaptation; (ii) Nguemism created through ethnic and clan loyalties and the ensuing self-enrichment and; (iii) human rights abuse and crushing of all elements of opposition. All of these factors combined to entrench an archetypal neo-patrimonial regime. These three elements will now be explained in more detail to show how in the early years of his presidency, Obiang Nguema managed to sustain the neo-patrimonial practices introduced under Macías' presidency from 1968-1979.

#### **4.2.1 Constitutional adaptation**

Two years after taking power, Obiang acknowledged the need for a new constitution and in 1982 this was drafted with the help of representatives from the UN Commission on Human Rights. Sundiata (1990:76) describes how "the powers of his presidency were considerable. He can make laws by decree, dissolve the legislature, negotiate and ratify treaties, call for parliamentary elections, and dismiss members of the cabinet [...] The prime minister is appointed, dismissed, and granted power by the head of state." Fegley (1989:210) argues that "a kind of schizophrenia pervades the document. Fundamental freedoms and all manner of "economic" rights stand side by

side with a strong presidency and an underlying tone of Flangist<sup>2</sup> (*sic*), if not Macías, authoritarianism.” Similarly Decalo (1998:101) describes how, “although Obiang slowly “civilianized” his cabinet [...] there was little sharing of power in Malabo. In 1982, a referendum gave the country a constitution that, on paper at least, is one of the most liberal in Africa [...] But these measures reduced neither Obiang’s concentrated power [...] nor the top-heavy preponderance of Fang elements in the administration and government.” The reason for ensuring such a tight grip on power, according to Fegley (1989:211), was Obiang’s “fear that he would one day face prosecution for his crimes in the Macías era.” Indeed, he goes on to note that “this may well be one reason why he [Obiang] laid down one condition before his acceptance of the draft: His term of office as president would begin on the day the constitution was approved by referendum. This meant that he would be legally guaranteed another seven years in office, seven years in which he could lose the stigma of being the butcher of Blackbich<sup>3</sup>” (Fegley 1989:211). Such measures are by no means unique to Obiang’s rule in Equatorial Guinea, and have been seen regularly in post-independence Africa in particular, as dictators have done their utmost to remain in power. Moreover, such actions are a central element of neo-patrimonial regimes. As Bratton and van de Walle (1997:62) explain, “the right to rule in neopatrimonial regimes is ascribed to a person rather than to an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. One individual [...] often a president for life, dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws.” Furthermore, the concentration of a high degree of political power within a narrow “predatory coalition” is a central characteristic of a neo-patrimonial regime according to Bavister-Gould (2011:1). Fegley (1989:225) surmises that:

By the end of his eighth year in power [1987], a clearer picture of Teodoro Obiang Nguema had emerged. As an extremely shrewd man with a checkered past and a present tainted with corruption, he has maneuvered himself into a position whereby he is the focal point of all power in Equatorial Guinea. He is the only remaining top official in the country whose roots are in the two concentrations of power which have arisen in post-colonial Equatorial Guinea: the military and the Esangui.

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<sup>2</sup> The author in fact means *Falangist*—the authoritarian ideology of Franco’s Spain.

<sup>3</sup> Also known as Blackbeach or Playa Negra—the infamous prison in Malabo where political prisoners (perhaps most famously the mercenaries Simon Mann and Nick Du Toit who staged the 2004 coup attempt) are held and routinely tortured.

Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2009:8) notes that “Obiang—not to be outdone by his predecessor and uncle—continued in the tradition of consolidating absolute and self-aggrandizing power.” And as such, the International Bar Association (2003:11) describes how, “there has been little more than ‘lip-service’ paid to multi-party democracy.” Taylor (2010:139) goes as far as to liken elections in Equatorial Guinea to those in North Korea with a presidential return of 99 percent. Consequently, Williams (2011:639) notes, “the Obiang regime, which came to power in a *coup d’état* and has stayed in power for over thirty years through corruption, violence, and the repression of opposition groups, can make no claim to legitimacy.” A key way in which Obiang has managed to continue his reign for so long is through surrounding himself with elites and cronies from his Esangui clan through his unique brand of ‘Nguemism’; an examination of this phenomenon now follows.

#### **4.2.2 The enactment of ‘Nguemism’ and self-enrichment**

A key attribute of the Macías regime was the centrality of the Esangui clan to politics. At the centre was Macías supported by his kinsmen and loyal henchmen. Power (and loyalty) gradually decreased as the concentric rings got larger. A similar strategy has been employed by Obiang since he became president in 1979. Shaxson (2008:124) notes that “at the center sits the president; next is his close family, then his sub-clan, then his Esangui clan from Mongomo [...] Kin relationships are central.” Fegley (1989:101) describes how “the original junta that came to power in 1979 was overwhelmingly composed of Nguema’s relatives, most from the Esangui clan and Mongomo region.” This is a classic feature of a neo-patrimonial regime—at the centre sits the ‘big man’ surrounded by his clients (in this case family and loyal kinsmen). As a result, Sandbrook and Barker (1985:89), explain: “A chief or strongman emerges and rules on the basis of material incentives and personal control of his administration and armed force. Fear and personal loyalties are the mainstays of a personalistic government untrammelled by traditional or modern constitutional limitations.” The danger of such a system based primarily on ties of kinship rather than democracy or meritocracy is that, according to Bratton and van de Walle (1997:62), “the chief executive and his inner circle undermine the effectiveness of the nominally modern

state administration by using it for systematic patronage and clientelist practices in order to maintain political order.” In addition to using the system to cling to political power, it will also become apparent in later sections that Obiang and his Esangui clan and the wider Fang ethnic group have used power primarily for self-enrichment purposes. The extremeness of the situation is made clear in the following quotation by Shaxson (2008:124):

An opposition activist, Juan Nzo, put it simply: “La Familia. There is nobody else.” Others, in private, call them Los Gordos or Los Intocables—The Fat Ones; The Untouchables. “The institutions of the state have a phantasmal existence, said an exiled opposition party. “Everything is manipulated to the will of the dictator.”

Woods (2004:547) goes even further by describing how “Equatorial Guinea’s ‘family caudillismo’ Nguemist regime matches or exceeds earlier Latin American manifestations both in rapacity and brutality.” He continues by noting that “Obiang initially pledged to put an end to the excesses of the Macias years.” However, in the end, “Obiang remained committed to entrenching his personal authority and that of the clan” (Woods 2004:549). As a result, Sundiata (1990:77) notes that the Cámara de Representantes del Pueblo (the Chamber of the People’s Representatives/the legislature) is controlled entirely by the president and cannot take any action without him sanctioning it. There were, however, some breaks with the past attempted, according to Sundiata (1990:78-79):

The government did eliminate the most glaring abuses of the Macias Nguema period. The appointment of a Bubi vice-president, S. Seriche Bioco, signaled a desire to give the regime the appearance of a broader ethnic base. However, Seriche Bioco remained the only non-Fang in high office. Armengol Ondo Nguema, the president’s elder brother, has been director of national security. The other two key security posts are in the hands of men with ethnic and personal ties to Obiang Nguema. Jesus Ngomo Nvono is head of the police and Ebengeng Nsomo is the deputy minister of defense. In a cabinet realignment in early 1986, Obiang Nguema assumed duties as minister of defense.

It is therefore apparent that by creating such a loyal clique it has been possible for President Obiang Nguema to ensure loyalty to his regime. Furthermore, by having such a tight grip on the security services it has made it possible for him to order

purges of the opposition as and when he has seen fit. Consequently, Shaxson (2008:124) explains that, “the Mongomo Clan has kept a tight grip since independence, when Obiang’s uncle Macías took over. Since toppling him in 1979, Obiang has directed bloody purges every 18 months or so, alleging coup plots that are often (but not always) fabricated.” Decalo (1998:101) describes how increasing coup attempts and conspiracies were a direct result of the concentration of power in Obiang’s hands. As with all neo-patrimonial regimes, the ‘have nots’ are forced to rebel in an attempt to gain a piece of the national pie.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one way in which Obiang’s predecessor, Macías sought to ensure his continuing power was through the creation of a cult of personality. Increasingly extreme (and comical) and rivalling only Idi Amin’s ‘Last King of Scotland’ in absurdity, Macías was to be known as “sole miracle” of Equatorial Guinea (Sundiata, 1983:93) amongst others. In a similar vein, Shaxson (2008:125) describes how:

Obiang is everywhere: on television or on the radio; he looks down from beneath his craggy eyebrows, frames in large portraits that hang in all the offices, which are talismans against bad luck [...] State media praises him, sometimes a bit too effusively. President Obiang “is like God in heaven. He has all power over men and things,” the radio once said. “He can decide to kill without being called to account and without going to hell because God himself, with whom he is in constant contact, gives him this strength.”

This last statement, is more tragic than comic when it is remembered how brutal and murderous Obiang’s regime has been. Bloomfield (2007:63) succinctly labels him “a brutal, bizarre jailer” whilst Fegley (1989:211) chooses the damning, alliterative label of “the butcher of Blackbich.” Although the numbers killed by Obiang’s regime may be only a fraction of those obliterated by his predecessor, the brutality has been no less, as will become apparent in the subsequent description of human rights abuses and the systematic liquidation of opposition figures. It is therefore unsurprising that Obiang is commonly known as ‘*El Jefe*’—The Boss (Global Witness 2004:53).

*El Jefe* has, since he took power in 1979, headed up a rather lucrative self-enrichment network. Ghazvinian (2007:177) argues that “it is probably fair to say that Equatorial

Guinea is less a functioning country than it is a lucrative family business that happens to come with a flag, an anthem, an army, and a seat at the United Nations.” The corruption and graft since the discovery of oil has been well-documented, but the commitment to self-enrichment has much earlier roots and highlights the entrenched nature of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea. It is at this point worth remembering Bach’s theory of ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonialism. Such a system sees “personal rule and control of resources reach paroxysmic level” (Bach 2012:30). As mentioned in chapter two, this study argues that Equatorial Guinea is an archetypal example of such a regime. According to the Open Society Justice Initiative (2010) the corrupt nature of the regime was thriving long before oil extraction began. A World Bank cocoa project introduced in the early 1980s to revive the industry decimated under Macías was exploited by Obiang and his cronies. Sundiata (1990:78) describes how, “in the early 1980s the bank announced that agricultural loans would be granted to landowners. The president and members of his family were quick to acquire land.” The Open Society Justice Initiative (2010) pronounced that “top government officials had foreseen a gold mine.” As a result, “in 1984 there were draconian nationalizations of farms that had not been continually occupied during the Macias terror. Most had been owned by Spaniards and Portuguese; now government ministers held title to the choicest farms. The Prime Minister had a beauty near Luba, and the President himself seized nearly four thousand acres near the Malabo airport” (Open Society Justice Initiative 2010). As Sundiata (1990:87) makes clear, the redistribution of resources, wealth and benefits were vital in order for Obiang to ensure sustained support for his regime; to avoid a similar fate to his uncle befalling him. The seizure of cocoa farms and the ensuing self-enrichment was not the only example of such corruption in the early years of Obiang’s presidency. Williams (2011:632) describes how endemic corruption had a tragic bearing on a measles epidemic that wreaked a trail of devastation through Equatorial Guinea in the 1980s. He describes how vaccines were made available through donations from outside the country. The drugs, however, “were reportedly stolen by government officials to be sold outside Equatorial Guinea.” Consequently, Fegley (1989:204) describes how, “much of the money received from international donors had been embezzled or squandered by officials. Swiss bank accounts had become part of the everyday life of the Equatorial Guinean

elite, while development plans and essential services ground to a halt.” This of course is routine behaviour in a neo-patrimonial regime. Mills (2010:16) explains that such behaviour is displayed and a resultant lack of development experienced because “better choices in the broad public interest were in many cases not in the leaders’ personal and often financial self-interest.” This is also a central element of Chabal and Daloz’s (1999:155) theory of disorder as political instrument—by keeping the state disordered it is easier for the elites to reach their own goal of self-enrichment. It is therefore clear that Chabal’s (2009:70) observation that a system of neo-patrimonialism is “nefarious to good governance” is an accurate description of the situation in Equatorial Guinea under Obiang Nguema. Indeed, Soares de Oliveira (2007:224) provides this fitting conclusion:

Even if one writes off Equatorial Guinea’s first decade of independence as a political freak occurrence, the post-1979 record remains uninspiring. In fact, a seminal work<sup>4</sup> considered pre-oil boom Equatorial Guinea to be one of the few states in sub-Saharan Africa in possession of a fully criminalised economy [...] Teodoro Obiang Nguema, halted the more demented forms of persecution [...] but had little impact on the downward slide of the formal economy. The decade that preceded the oil boom was characterised by an unusual degree of delinquency, with the presidential clan exploring the most farfetched forms of economic extraversion to ensure personal and regime viability. John Bennett, a former US ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, described the regime as not so much a government as “an ongoing family criminal conspiracy.”

As will become apparent later in this chapter, such a network of appropriation and self-enrichment was only going to thrive and become even more profitable after the discovery of oil. It is, however, obvious that the corruption and the looting of state coffers was already accepted and entrenched practice. Therefore, it is fair to say that, “oil has exacerbated already present pathologies in Equatorial Guinea’s political economy, paving the way for a future of underdevelopment, instability and authoritarian rule” (McSherry 2006:24). The authoritarian nature of the Obiang regime is seen most obviously through the gross human rights abuses and purging of opposition elements to which our attention will now turn.

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<sup>4</sup> Jackson, R. H. and Rosberg, C. G. 1982. *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant*. Berkley, CA; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press—this work is mentioned in the literature review of Chapter II.

### 4.2.3 “The butcher of Blackbich”: human rights abuse and the elimination of opposition elements

Chapter three illustrated the extensive terror and torture network that was operationalised in Equatorial Guinea under Macías Nguema. Baynham (1986:30) notes that, “President Nguema’s 11 years of rule had resulted in between 35 000 and 50 000 deaths, with at least one-quarter of the country’s 350 000 estimated population in exile.” As a result, a Spanish newspaper reported that the only business worth setting up in Equatorial Guinea would be a funeral parlour (quoted in Global Witness 2004:53). In contrast, Human Rights Watch (2009:8) reports how, “under Obiang, schools have reopened, primary education has expanded, and public utilities and roads have been restored; to that extent his rule compares favourably with Macías’ tyranny and terror.” The same report, however, goes on to note that, “there have been no free and fair elections since independence in 1968. The calling of elections has often been accompanied by intimidation and imprisonment of the opposition; the government has typically used the pretext of thwarting a coup attempt as justification for its actions” (Human Rights Watch 2009:11). Sundiata (1990:80), however, notes that “the government and its supporters have been highly adept at obscuring the issue [of human rights abuses]. The 1985 report of Amnesty International [...] did not include Equatorial Guinea. It did say that the absence of certain countries was not proof of an absence of human rights violations but only indicated the difficulty of getting information.” As a result, Woods (2004:547) explains that “the country has a well-deserved reputation for gross human rights abuses.” A similar conclusion is drawn by McSherry (2006:25) who notes that “human rights groups routinely describe him as one of the world’s worst dictators, pointing to gross human rights abuses and tight restrictions on civil and political freedoms.” Such a situation fits with Chabal and Daloz’s neo-patrimonial theory where they note that “in most African countries the ‘state’ not only fails to protect the population from crime but is itself responsible for a high level of violence, both through the direct abuse of power and because of its predatory nature” (1999:77). Moreover, Bavister-Gould’s (2011) criteria for a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime includes (amongst others) the following: “a ruthless application of coercion and repression to gain and especially maintain power; [...] the use of a mixture of fear and reward as a means of retaining the loyalty of

immediate followers and supporters; [...] the use of often considerable brutality and exclusion as the means for punishing opponents or competitors” (Bavister-Gould:1-2). It is clear that the extreme level of terror and brutality that is employed by the Nguema regime to ensure its survival marks it out as a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial state.

Whilst many hoped that the use of terror and the resulting brutal human rights abuses would be destroyed with Macías, Woods (2004:549) instead notes that “despite claims of acting as a ‘liberator’, his [Obiang’s] coup represented less of a revolution than the reconstitution of Nguemism.” Furthermore, Yates (2012:94) argues that the continuation of barbarous acts under Obiang should not be a surprise, considering that he was head of state security under Macías. A key feature of Obiang’s terror machine was his employment of the Moroccan Guard (as Chapter three detailed, the execution of Macías had to be entrusted to them as no Equatorial Guinean soldier agreed to carry out the killing for fear of supernatural retribution). Indeed, Sundiata (1990:77) describes how “the use of several hundred Moroccan troops as a presidential bodyguard has provided the leadership with a further hedge against a coup d’état or popular revolution. Although local forces outnumber these troops, they are ill-equipped.” Such a situation is common in states dominated by neo-patrimonial rule. This is because concerns about internal power struggles and mutiny are significantly reduced by not employing citizens of the country: loyalty is only to the employer rather than any clan or familial ties. Obiang now relies on the services of a US private security company; a reflection of the close ties between the two countries as a result of the discovery of oil and the US as the main consumer of this. This is in vast contrast to the conditions of relations between the two states in the early 1990s. Soares de Oliveira (2007:229) describes how, “the US government had until recently a sufficiently detached rapport with Equatorial Guinea to allow a dispassionate look at its politics. Especially in the early 1990s, this led to a very critical stance on human rights abuses that precipitated government accusations of witchcraft against the US Ambassador. This was one affront too many from an obscure backwater and led to the closing down of the embassy in 1995.” It is, therefore, perhaps surprising that less than ten years later in 2003 the embassy was reopened, even though no change in

government and consequently human rights abuses had occurred (Taylor 2010:138). *The Washington Post* (2006) was incredulous when it reported that, “it is uncontroversial to observe that Mr. Obiang is no friend to his people. But he is a “good friend” of the United States, at least according to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.” Then again, given that only a short time after the US withdrew from Equatorial Guinea significant oil reserves were discovered offshore (Taylor 2010:138) it all becomes much more transparent.

In sum, the disastrous condition that Equatorial Guinea was in when Macías was overthrown in 1979 was barely improved after the first decade of Obiang’s rule (prior to the discovery of oil). Indeed, Fegley (1989:231) offers this scathing conclusion:

If Equatorial Guinea had turned a new leaf, it is still on the same branch as the old. Obiang retains the final word. New, constitutions, legislative elections and religious freedom should not be discarded as ploys too quickly, but the President’s less-than-democratic attitudes cannot be ignored. If Obiang’s regime is not as violent as its predecessor’s, it may be a sign that times are getting better. On the other hand, the lesser tyranny of the nephew may only indicate how effectively the cruelty of the uncle dealt with their common foes. One cannot say that the political position of the exiles has improved in any way; the reverse is probably the case [...] Economically, no landmarks have been passed and socially the country is still catching up to 1968. There are many indicators which lead one to optimism or pessimism, but to most observers Equatorial Guinea seems to be on a treadmill going nowhere. The spells caused by both Madrid and Macías remain to be broken.

The subsequent section focused on developments in Equatorial Guinea following the discovery of oil will attempt to show whether these spells have indeed been broken, or whether the vast sums associated with oil extraction have in fact served to entrench the neo-patrimonial Obiang regime further.

#### **4.3 FROM THE ARMPIT TO THE KUWAIT OF AFRICA(?): EQUATORIAL GUINEA SINCE THE DISCOVERY OF OIL (1996-PRESENT)**

Prior to the discovery of oil in 1995 Equatorial Guinea was widely regarded as a ‘tropical backwater’; or at least by the few who had heard of this small country in the armpit of West Africa (Clarke 2010:136; Frynas 2004:527; Gary and Karl 2003:38;

Ghazvinian 2007:170; McSherry 2006:24). Indeed, Frynas (2004:527) describes how, “in less than a decade, Equatorial Guinea has transformed itself from an African backwater into one of the world’s fastest growing economies and a sought-after political partner in the Gulf of Guinea. The sole reason for this transformation has been the discovery of oil and gas.” The discovery of oil and the resultant meteoric rise in income means that Equatorial Guinea boasts the highest GDP per capita in Africa \$24,036 (2012) (World Bank 2013a) and means that the country is classed as a high income country by the World Bank (2013b). As the introduction to this thesis noted, however, according to the UNDP HDI Equatorial Guinea is ranked 136 out of 187 countries (UNDP 2013). As will become apparent through the following discussion, it is the ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime in place in Equatorial Guinea that is responsible for the vast disparity between GDP per capita income and Human Development Index ranking. Knight (2003:338) questions whether “this new wealth [from oil] will benefit the majority of people [... because...] The government’s long-term economic record is poor.” Sobering words are provided by Ndikumana and Boyce (2012:2) who note that:

Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of Congo are among the richest countries in Africa [...] While their presidents and other members of the political elite are amassing fortunes abroad, the majority of their fellow citizens live in abject poverty, lacking access to basic social services such as decent sanitation, clean drinking water, elementary school, and health care. Despite Equatorial Guinea’s large oil revenues, a baby born there has less chance of living to his or her fifth birthday than the average sub-Saharan African infant.

The central explanation for such a sorry state of affairs, according to Frère (2007:207) is that, “Equatorial Guinea, an authoritarian and neopatrimonial state, is organized for the benefit of a single family who monopolizes the state’s resources and functions.” Indeed, Ghazvinian (2007:177) describes how, “Equatorial Guinea is [...] a lucrative family business” and “a self-parodying burlesque of a tin-pot kleptocracy” (Ghazvinian 2007:170). Similarly, Puppim de Oliveira and Ali (2006:7) argue that “the EG government is considered by many commentators as one of the most notorious kleptocracies in Africa.” It is the ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime in place that explains why the son of President Obiang, Teodorin (widely touted as his likely

successor) can stay at the luxurious Plaza Athénée in Paris, own a Malibu mansion and spend \$7 million on houses in Cape Town whilst always carrying a briefcase stuffed with cash (Global Witness 2009a); yet, outside of one of the many swish oil conferences hosted in the capital, Malabo, “restrained by a low wall and the soldiers, people in tattered shirts and flip-flops stood in dirty brown groups, watching and listening. The chances are that they cannot afford doctors, one in six of their children die before their fifth birthday, and their drinking water tastes of mud” (Shaxson 2008:122). The remainder of this chapter will provide a discussion and explanation of the effect of the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea and how it has only served to exacerbate neo-patrimonial practices and entrench the Obiang regime. First, a discussion of the resource curse in relation to Equatorial Guinea will be given, followed by an insight into three central factors that highlight neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea since the discovery of oil. These are: (i) capital flight, profligate spending and international complacency; (ii) repression of opponents and human rights abuses (including a brief summary of the 2004 ‘Wonga’ Coup) and; (iii) transparency initiatives and prospects for oil and regime survival in the future. By carrying out this analysis it will be possible to ascertain the extent to which neo-patrimonialism has become entrenched in Equatorial Guinea and whether the classification of the Nguema regime as ‘predatory’ is justified.

#### **4.3.1 Well oiled: the ‘resource curse’ in Equatorial Guinea**

Following the publication of the 2013 World Development Indicators by the World Bank, Marcelo Guigale, the Bank’s Director of Economic Policy and Poverty Reduction Programs for Africa, commented that most of the countries “with the highest incidence of extreme poverty [...] are rich or very rich in natural resources, things like oil, gas or minerals” (Guigale 2013). As such, the founder of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Juan Pablo Alfonzo, warned that instead of being “black gold” petroleum revenues can instead turn out to be “the excrement of the devil” (quoted in Gary and Karl 2003:19). This ‘paradox of plenty’ is explained by Bridge and Le Billion (2013:32) who describe how, “oil often fuels dreams of development, yet the reality of modernization through oil frequently falls short. Tensions revolve around the management, or squandering of oil reserves, the

creation of oil dependency, and the challenges of the so-called “resource curse”—that countries with abundant natural resources tend to have worse development outcomes than those with limited endowments.” Similarly, Dunning (2008:xv) notes that, “a massive flow of natural resource revenues into the fiscal coffers of the state engendered perverse political as well as economic effects. Not only did natural resource booms cripple non-resource export sectors and inhibit various forms of productive economic activity, they also fostered corruption, weakened accountability, and heightened incentives for rent-seeking.” Moreover, McSherry (2006:24) describes how in Equatorial Guinea:

[A] combination of poor development performance, entrenched authoritarianism, and political instability mirror the experiences of other natural resource abundant countries throughout the world. The so-called “resource curse” has thwarted the hopes of many poor, primary commodity exporters and spawned an extensive academic literature intent on explaining this seemingly paradoxical outcome.<sup>5</sup> This diverse literature can help explain Equatorial Guinea’s current plight and shed light on what lies ahead -- further underdevelopment, few opportunities for democratization, increased political instability, and violence.

It would seem to be clear that Equatorial Guinea is an archetypal example of a state suffering from a ‘resource curse’. Gary and Karl (2003:39) observe that “in less than a decade, and in the classic boom scenario, oil has gone from being completely unknown to being the only game in town — the oil sector rose from 11 percent of GDP in 1993 to 86 percent in 2000.” Whereas “agriculture — primarily cocoa and coffee — has fallen as a percentage of GDP from almost 60 percent in 1991 to less than 9 percent in 2000.” Taylor (2010:139) meanwhile reports that “in Equatorial Guinea oil represents 92 percent of its total exports.” Despite this huge increase in income, improvements in terms of development are hard to see:

Billions of dollars of oil revenue have gone into building an ostentatious second capital city (“Malabo II”), while health and education remains a mere 1.23 percent of the government’s budget, despite the desperate need for basic

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘resource curse’ thesis first proposed by Auty in 1993 “focuses on the tendency of natural resource abundant countries to suffer from low economic growth and disappointing development outcomes” (McSherry, 2006: 26). This has given rise to an extensive body of academic literature and debate. This debate, however, will not be entered into here as it is not the primary theoretical focus of this thesis.

infrastructure constructions such as roads, schools and hospital. Meanwhile *at least 80 percent of oil revenues are captured by 5 percent of the country's population* [emphasis added], who indulge in profligate spending on luxury items.

A central explanation for the negative effects that the oil discovery has had on Equatorial Guinea is that the state was already in a condition of political dereliction. Shaxson (2008:5) illustrates this clearly when he reasons that “resources like oil and gas should be a blessing for countries that produce it. Norway and Britain seem to have done well out of their oilfields, but in Africa the record is different. Producing oil seems to be a bit like taking cocaine: if you are already healthy it might invigorate you, but if you are weak or sick, as many African countries are, it can do you serious harm.” Similarly, Williams (2011:630) notes that, “Equatorial Guinea’s oil wealth, far from being a blessing to the population, has been a curse. It is central to a culture of corruption that has enriched only the ruling elite and the corporations that share in the resource wealth.” Indeed, the devastating effect that the discovery of oil has had on development is summed up by Shaxson (2005:318) who notes that, “Equatorial Guinea has lost ground in the UN’s Human Development Indicators since the mid-1990s.”

A review of literature relating to the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea shows that a predominant suggestion is that the country is suffering from a resource curse. It should, however, be emphasised that it is rather a long-running governance problem that is responsible for the dire situation in Equatorial Guinea. Yes, undoubtedly the vast revenues resulting from oil extraction have entrenched neo-patrimonialism, but as is clear from the preceding analysis, the root of the problem was sown long ago. Indeed, Clarke (2010:533) argues that, “the root dilemma is found in the political apparatus, rather than in oil itself.” Likewise, McSherry (2006:24) explains that, “oil has exacerbated already present pathologies in Equatorial Guinea’s political economy.” Shaxson (2007:1123) explains that the reason for Equatorial Guinea suffering in the way that it has from the newly discovered oil is that, “the poorer and weaker a country is before the oil discovery, the more likely it is to be harmed by it.” It is therefore apparent that such countries are rather suffering from a broader

*governance curse* than a ‘resource curse’ caused by the oil. Oil has merely accentuated the situation. In other words, it is the entrenched ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonialism that is to blame for Equatorial Guinea’s development woes rather than the discovery of oil. Oil has merely served to fuel an already efficient and systemic neo-patrimonial regime. Consequently, Same (2008:22) emphasises that it is “critical to assess the policies, institutions and capacity for the management of Equatorial Guinea’s oil dominated economy.” This will be accomplished through the subsequent examinations of various factors that emphasise the extensive *governance curse* affecting Equatorial Guinea, which in turn show that the suggested ‘resource curse’ is merely one element of this broader phenomenon; it is to these factors that our attention is now turned.

#### **4.3.2 Fuelling neo-patrimonialism: capital flight, profligate spending and international complacency**

A key feature of a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime according to Bavister-Gould (2011:1) is “the use of [...] power to control economic resources, accompanied by wide discretion in their use or distribution [and]; the failure to use such resources for any observable developmental purpose.” As such, Mills (2010:16) believes that the reason for Africa’s developmental problems is that it has not been in the interests of the elites in these countries to work for the public good. Instead, Smith (2008:234) notes that the sole purpose of a ‘predatory’ state is “endowing the political elite with power, wealth, and privilege.” The kleptocratic tendencies of the Nguema family make it clear to see that this is a central characteristic of politics in Equatorial Guinea. In their theory of neo-patrimonialism, Chabal and Daloz (1999) argue that there exists a ‘political instrumentalization of disorder’. This means that, “political actors in Africa seek to maximize their returns on the state of confusion, uncertainty, and sometimes even chaos” (Chabal and Daloz 1999:xviii). The state is seen as being at its *most effective* when it is in fact at its *most ineffective* (in the eyes of external observers and those excluded from the patronage network). In other words, Chabal and Daloz (1999:14) describe how “[the state is] *ineffectual* in that it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper institutionalization of the state apparatus. Or to put it another way, its usefulness is greatest when it is least

institutionalized.” Although the current system does not work towards development priorities or to improve the lot of the rank-and-file, it works perfectly well for the elites in control. Consequently, there is no motivation or political will to be harnessed by elites to change the system. In their eyes: *Africa works!*

One way in which a lack of institutionalisation and ineffectualness is displayed in Equatorial Guinea is through the auditing (or lack of) of oil revenues. Woods (2004:559) notes that oil revenues and associated spending is an official state secret. Gary and Karl (2003:1) highlight the detrimental effect of such a practice, “without improving their democratic institutions and administrative capacity, it is unlikely that African oil exporters will be able to use petrodollars to fuel poverty reduction.” Such an observation, however, somewhat misinterprets the reality in a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial state such as Equatorial Guinea—yes, a drive toward a more transparent process (as will be elaborated upon later in this chapter) would be beneficial, but there is a complete lack of political will to do so (Center for Economic and Social Rights 2009:1). It is not in the interests of the Nguema regime to reform; they profit handsomely from the system as in its current guise. Indeed, Williams (2011:632-33) describes how:

In spite of an official salary of \$5,000 per month from his position as minister of forestry and agriculture, Teodoro Obiang own [an] estate in Malibu,<sup>6</sup> two large homes in Cape Town [...] and a number of expensive cars, including seven Ferraris, two Lamborghinis, two Maybachs, five Bentleys, two Porsches, and four Rolls Royces. With other family members possessing similar portfolios and equally small salaries, it is easy to see why Equatorial Guinea annually ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world.<sup>7</sup>

An internet search for ‘Equatorial Guinea’ produces a limitless array of newspaper articles and reports by NGOs relating to the extravagant spending habits of the

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<sup>6</sup> Purchased for \$30 million in 2006... “the property is just one of many luxury homes scattered around the world that are owned by the younger Obiang; all have been purchased using funds siphoned from the state treasury or collected in bribes” (Williams, 2011: 621).

<sup>7</sup> Equatorial Guinea is currently ranked 163/176 in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (2012) with “budget openness” classed as “scant or none”.

Nguema regime (the president's son Teodoro in particular).<sup>8</sup> According to the Center for Economic and Social Rights (2009:1) such profligate spending is allowed to take place because of "misappropriate and secret diversions of billions of dollars in oil and gas revenues by government officials, with the collusion of foreign banks and oil companies." None more so than Riggs Bank, a US bank that found itself at the centre of a US Senate investigation into money-laundering and corruption in 2004.

According to Global Witness (2004:55), the reason why "Equatorial Guinea's oil money may not be driving the country's development [is] because much of it may not even be in the country." The extent of the problem is summed up by Williams (2011:631-32) who notes that:

The total value of Riggs Bank account balances and outstanding loans held by the Obiang family, the families of other senior government officials, and the government of Equatorial Guinea was almost \$700 million. Bank managers reported that, on occasion, Equatoguinean embassy staff and others brought suitcases full of cash into a bank branch to be deposited. Simply put, President Obiang and those closest to him were taking in millions of dollars from the sale of Equatorial Guinea's oil and felt no qualms about keeping the money in a US bank.

A key point is made by Human Rights Watch (2009:21) who explain that, "offshore accounts are common among oil producers in order to receive payments in dollars, but, importantly, President Obiang and his close relatives maintained signatory authority over many of the Riggs accounts and had complete discretion over the use of those funds." Indeed, Silverstein (2006) describes how, "Obiang treats Equatorial Guinea's national treasury like his personal checking account." This is, of course, typical practice in a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial state. The reason for this is that in a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial system, "the idea of a dissociation between public office and the ruler's private interests tends to become irrelevant" (Bach 2012:31). In other words, the elite sees state property as their own to do with as they wish: self-enrichment will always trump development priorities in such a state. It would seem that President Obiang is only too aware of the situation. In an interview with Hilsum

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<sup>8</sup> A particularly shocking (albeit entertaining) account is provided in Global Witness, *The Secret Life of a Shopaholic: How an African Dictator's Playboy son went on a Multi-Million Dollar Shopping Spree in the U.S.*, November 2009.

(2003) he commented: “I am the one who arranges things in this country because in Africa there are lots of problems of corruption. If there is corruption, diversion of funds, then I’m responsible. I’m 100 percent sure of all the oil revenue because the one who signs is me.” If he is so sure of the oil revenues, then why would he be so anxious to keep them a state secret? The diversion of these revenues for personal enrichment is surely the only explanation. A report by Global Witness (2009b:4) argues that it is the banking industry that plays a major role in allowing corruption to continue. They argue that, “by accepting customers, banks are—directly or indirectly—assisting those who are using the assets of the state to enrich themselves or brutalise their own people. Corruption is not just done by the dictator who has control of natural resource revenues. He needs a bank willing to take the money. It take two to tango.” It is, however, also patently clear that it does not just take ‘two to tango’ in this case. Yes, it is apparent that Riggs Bank did not take due diligence seriously when vetting the Obiang family as account holders—a notorious Riggs Bank internal memo questioning where the money was coming from, jokingly answered: “Oil—Black Gold—Texas Tea!” (Shaxson, 2008:128). But, Global Witness’ (2009b:11) report also makes the important point that, “the crucial point, less well recognised, is that the leaders of shadow states cannot loot the national coffers without help from outside.” Of course oil companies may turn a blind eye in order to win concessions, but the international system more widely and states in particular are also complicit.

An article in the *Los Angeles Times* by Silverstein (2003) reports that in response to the proposed US reengagement in Equatorial Guinea, “critics say the administration should not embrace Obiang's regime until it improves its human rights record and implements anticorruption reforms.” Of course, Condoleezza Rice’s now infamous reference to Obiang as a “good friend” of the US show that such warnings were not heeded (*The Washington Post* 2006). Such a policy move should perhaps not be seen as surprising, however, given Rice’s employment history as director of Chevron from 1991 to 2001 (Goodman 2008). In turn, of course Chevron are “pleased to be working in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea again” (quoted in Smolczyk 2006). As a result, Esteban (2009:673) argues that, “Western oil companies [are] the main corporate partners for the perpetuation of the Obiang regime.” The desperate need of the US

amongst others to secure oil sources away from the temperamental Middle Eastern Gulf has made Equatorial Guinea's high-quality, sweet crude highly desirable and has resulted in a former US Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, Frank Ruddy describing the Bush administration as, "big cheerleaders for the government [of Equatorial Guinea]—and it's an awful government" (quoted in Maass 2005). The oil boom in Equatorial Guinea has, according to Frynas and Paulo (2006:240), drastically "improved the bargaining power of Equatorial Guinea, and President Obiang." It has also, as will be explored later in this chapter, allowed the Nguema regime to, quite literally, get away with murder. International complicity is a huge problem in the perpetuation of the 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime in Equatorial Guinea. International partners (including the US, World Bank and IMF) are quite aware that the legal-rational façade that Equatorial Guinea presents to the outside world, is just that: a smoke-screen. The system benefits the oil companies and their consumers and the banks that facilitate capital flight as much as it does the Nguema regime as the weakness of the Equatorial Guinean states allows them to secure preferential concessions and increase profits. Consequently, there is a complete lack of political will on their part to reform the system as well (this will be explored in greater detail in the later section on transparency initiatives): resulting in a vicious cycle that is seemingly impossible to break.

Furthermore, as Williams (2011:647-48) notes:

Within Africa, President Obiang's stock appears to be rising. Along with neighboring Gabon, Equatorial Guinea has been selected to host the African Cup of Nations, the continent's premier soccer tournament, in 2012. Finally, in January 2011, within days of Hosni Mubarak's forced removal from power in Egypt, President Obiang was elected to serve as the ceremonial head of the African Union, a move that left many governments and human rights groups lamenting the fact that the AU would make such an unfortunate and inopportune statement regarding its commitment to democratization.

Although outside of the continent, the appointment of Obiang to the chair of the African Union (AU) was controversial, it suggests that he is well-supported on the African continent. Indeed, it could well be said that the support for his appointment merely highlights the image of the AU as a 'Dictator's Club' which only exists to

espouse the sovereignty of blood-thirsty tyrants such as Obiang and Mugabe and support them against foreign criticism of their regimes through its mantra of non-interference and anti-Western rhetoric. Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2011) criticised the government for spending “more than US\$830 million to construct a luxury complex for the summit outside the nation's capital, Malabo.” This is despite the fact that the majority of the population live in a state of extreme poverty. This suggests instead that such a ‘white elephant’ construction was merely to serve the ego of the Nguema ‘family business’. The excessiveness of the spending is emphasised by Human Rights Watch (2011) who note that, “Education spending was approximately \$200 million in 2008, the most recent year for which the figure could be calculated. That sum is less than one-quarter of the government's expenditures on building the complex to host the AU summit.” Once again this highlights the skewed priorities of the Obiang regime in regards to spending government revenues. The flagrant disregard for the needs of the population as a whole only serves to underline the ‘predatory’ nature of the neo-patrimonial regime in Equatorial Guinea. The support afforded by the AU and its member states further serves as an example of the relative acceptance of the practice on the African continent. With such international complacency it is therefore unsurprising that the ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime in Equatorial Guinea continues, and largely unchallenged. Even when challenges are made, they are quickly suppressed by the efficient repression apparatus in place, the nature of which our attention is now turned to.

#### **4.3.3 Oiling the repression machine: crushing the opposition and the ‘Wonga’ Coup of 2004**

It is often thought that Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe is the world’s worst dictator (Maas 2008). At least that’s what the international media would have us believe. But Bloomfield (2007) and Maass (2008), amongst others, believe the crown lies elsewhere:

But Mugabe may not be Africa’s worst. That prize arguably goes to Teodoro Obiang, the ruler of Equatorial Guinea whose life seems a parody of the dictator genre. Years of violent apprenticeship in a genocidal regime led by a crazy uncle? Check. Power grab in a coup against the murderous uncle?

Check. Execution of now-deposed uncle by firing squad? Check. Proclamation of self as “the liberator” of the nation? Check. Govern for decades in a way that prompts human rights groups to accuse your regime of murder, torture, and corruption? Check, check, and check. (Maass 2008)

Similarly, Williams (2011:621) notes that the Nguema regime’s “grip on power has been secured through a heavy reliance on nepotism, the use of foreign soldiers and private military corporations to guard the elite and their assets, and the ruthless suppression of dissent.” Such behaviour is, according to Cammack (2007:600) in-keeping with a neo-patrimonial regime as the “overarching logic is to gain and retain power at all costs.” This is, of course, with absolutely no regard paid to human rights. Shaxson (2008:38) describes how, “as Equatorial Guinea took its first faltering steps into the oil age, I wondered if oil would make Obiang’s brutal government behave better.” This of course, unfortunately, has not been the case. In fact, if anything, the oil money has only served to make the brutality worse as the repression machine is fuelled by its revenues. Moreover, Clarke (2010:140) explains that, “new oil wealth has made the regime protective and paranoid, with plots seen everywhere and periodic crackdowns a regular experience.” Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2009:2) reveal that “billions of dollars in oil revenue have not translated into widespread economic benefits for the population or dramatic improvements in human rights, making Equatorial Guinea a classic example of an autocratic and opaque oil-rich state.” Furthermore, following a visit to Equatorial Guinea, the International Bar Association (2003:6) reported that, “torture, failure to guarantee the right to a fair trial, lack of freedom of expression and association, and poor prison conditions are just some examples of the abuses that occur with the impunity that exists in Equatorial Guinea.” The true extent of repression in Equatorial Guinea is summed up by a Human Rights Watch (2009:2) report as follows:

Dating back to before the oil boom, the current regime’s efforts to control the country’s political space and economic resources have fuelled a culture of fear marked by repression of the opposition and military purges. The main difference in recent years is that the stakes are higher: for a corrupt and nepotistic regime that has vastly profited from the oil boom, the incentives to open up the political space and become more accountable to the country’s citizens are few. But with political power in Equatorial Guinea now a prize of unprecedented worth, the country appears seriously unstable.

Perhaps the most infamous instance of repression and terror in Equatorial Guinea under Obiang Nguema was following the so-called ‘Wonga’ Coup of March 2004, masterminded by the British, ex-SAS mercenary, Simon Mann and his South African comrades, including Nick du Toit and financed by Mark Thatcher (the son of former British Prime Minister, Margaret), amongst others (McSherry, 2006:23). Human Rights Watch (2009:73) reports that, “the Equatorial Guinean government claims Mann and Du Toit were part of an operation intended to overthrow the government of Equatorial Guinea and replace President Obiang with the exiled Severo Moto.” The main motivation for the coup was to “get rich” (Wallace 2012). The mercenaries believed that in the ‘Wonga’ Coup, they had “the perfect plot, meticulously planned, audacious and hugely lucrative, the takeover, no less, of a small country with massive oil riches” (Sengupta 2008). Although the plan ultimately failed, perhaps what is most surprising is how much of the plot was executed before Mann and his men were captured at Harare airport on March 7 2004 (Human Rights Watch 2009:73). Of course, Obiang rewarded Mugabe handsomely for his loyalty and support in the form of bounty derived from oil revenues. As Clarke (2010:533) makes clear, “this was one lifelong dictator kissing another, a reality about which we should not be too surprised.” Such support was not forthcoming from the wider international community (despite obligations under international law), however, with it reported that Madrid, Washington and London were well aware of the plans that were afoot (Barnett and Bright 2004). Unsurprisingly, serious allegations of torture were levelled at the Nguema regime, following the arrest and detention of the coup plotters. A report by Human Rights Watch (2009:77) notes that:

Observers from the International Bar Association and Amnesty International concluded that the trial was highly flawed, especially due to serious procedural failings and allegations that torture was used to extract statements. Amnesty International delegates noted that during both the pretrial stage and the court hearing itself there were serious procedural irregularities in the application of Equatorial Guinea law and a flagrant disregard for regional and international human rights law and standards.

Such a conclusion, although shocking should not come as a surprise when the Nguema regime in Equatorial Guinea is examined through a lens of neo-

patrimonialism; and ‘predatory’ rule specifically. As previously mentioned, Cammack (2007:600) argues that the logic of neo-patrimonialism is to remain in power; no matter what the costs. This would therefore suggest that no methods are off-limits. Jackson and Rosberg (1982:1) note that, “the political “game” in most African states is not yet governed by regulations that effectively prevent the unsanctioned use of coercion and violence. Consequently, politics are more personalized and less restrained.” Indeed a rallying cry made by President Obiang himself highlights the lack of restraint he was willing to employ in punishing those who threaten his rule, “[...] we have to eliminate these terrorists, we have to kill them without the need of taking them to justice. Nobody will ask us if they are killed in the act because they have come with bad intentions [...] they must be liquidated, they must be killed because they are the devils” (quoted in Roberts 2006:198). This is very much a belief that if you live by the sword, you will die by the sword too. One of the worst fates was to befall Gerhard Merz, an arms trader who was imprisoned in Black Beach (Playa Negra) following the coup attempt. Although the official Equatorial Guinean line was that he died from a very rapid onset of cerebral malaria:

Fellow prisoners later said Merz died in front of them, in the cell, after torture. Abel Augusto said Merz enraged the interrogators. ‘When they hit him, he never said a word.’ This provoked more severe battering. ‘After one beating he started speaking German, which he never did before’. Dumped back in the cell, he was in wretched shape. Fellow prisoners called for medical help but were ignored. He collapsed, apparently from a massive heart attack [...] When an autopsy was finally done in Germany [over three months later] it was found Merz had not died of malaria (Roberts 2006:199).

The treatment of Merz although an extreme example, was not the only instance of ill-treatment. Human Rights Watch (2009:78-79) reports that, “the confessions made by the detainees in Equatorial Guinea in 2004 were clearly suspect, as were several statements made in Zimbabwe, which Mann claims were made only following torture and duress.” It is clear that President Obiang was staying true to his word. Furthermore, it was not only the coup plotters who were to suffer. Roberts (2006:192) describes how, “reaction to the coup attempt was fierce and furious in Malabo [...] Many innocent people were promptly rounded up.” It is clear that Obiang was following Macías’ earlier example—as Decalo (1998:99) explained; the clothes of the

emperor may be different, but that shouldn't fool anyone: personal dictatorship is still the *modus operandi*.

As previously mentioned, the vast increase in revenue provided from oil exports has enabled President Obiang to establish a larger, more efficient and therefore, brutal security apparatus to deal with any opposition. Additionally, the discovery of oil has affected another aspect of human rights abuse in Equatorial Guinea: international condemnation (or rather the lack of). Indeed, in his book *My Life for My People*, Obiang comments that: "I have realized that the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea and especially the importance of these resources has completely changed the attitude of many of our partners, especially those who were more critical. Suddenly they have become more permissive" (quoted in Human Rights Watch 2009:87). Furthermore, Esteban (2009:673) explains that the vast oil revenues "release the state from popular pressure on political accountability and have been used to reinforce Obiang's grip on power through patronage, co-optation and repression." Taylor (2010:138) notes that in 2003 the US reopened its embassy in Equatorial Guinea without any improvement in human rights treatment from when they closed it eight years earlier. Esteban (2009:679), however, explains how:

In countries like the United States and Spain, making diplomatic concessions to and engaging in business with such a repressive and corrupt regime as that headed by Obiang badly affect the popularity of the authorities. This greatly reduces the scope for bilateral co-operation and explains the low profile given by the Bush and Zapatero administrations to their relationships with Malabo. For example, when President Bush had breakfast with Obiang in 2002 the White House refused to release any photograph of the meeting. Contrary to normal practices at this kind of event, the US Department of State made no official comments on the reopening of the US embassy in Malabo in order to avoid any focus on the issue.

In contrast, Esteban (2009:669) observes that, "the Chinese government is more supportive of the Obiang regime [...] than its Western counterparts, since Chinese authorities are not hostile to this kind of political regime and do not suffer pressure from domestic civil society on this issue." Regardless of this, Ross (2008:8) warns that it may not all be plain-sailing for Chinese oil companies in Equatorial Guinea because, as was seen in the Sudan, "pressure could work against these companies, as

many of them are publicly listed [...] the Dutch pension fund PGGM withdrew its \$54 million investment in Chinese oil company PetroChina to protest the operations of PetroChina's parent company in Sudan." Such a move suggests a push towards transparency and improved human rights standards; a factor that will be examined in the following section as the future prospects of the Nguema regime in Equatorial Guinea is considered.

#### **4.3.4 Looking to the future: the drive for transparency and the prospects for regime survival**

As explained in the earlier discussion of the 'resource curse', Equatorial Guinea is currently suffering from an extreme governance curse. Gary and Karl (2003:1) observe that at present oil revenues are captured by a government that lacks accountability. Consequently, these revenues are spent at the will of the Nguema regime rather than in a way that benefits the populace as a whole. Such practice is in-keeping with a system of neo-patrimonialism. Bratton and van de Walle (1997:62) explain how, "officials occupy bureaucratic positions less to perform public service, their ostensible purpose, than to acquire personal wealth and status." Furthermore, a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime exists when neo-patrimonialism "permeates the *entire* state" (Bach 2012:31) because "personal rule and control of resources reach a paroxysmic level [...] the idea of a dissociation between public office and the ruler's private interests tends to become irrelevant" (Bach 2012:30). According to Gary and Karl (2003:1) and Ross (2008:6), an option for reversing such a situation is to improve transparency.

A Global Witness (2004:5) report into transparency observes that, "the international community has taken its first steps towards recognising the importance of improved transparency and accountability of natural resource revenues." Furthermore, Puppim de Oliveira and Ali (2006:11) note that the Riggs Bank scandal and the resultant US Senate investigation is the first step (of many required) toward acknowledging the need for increased transparency, accountability and responsibility. One of the most well-known initiatives to have been (briefly) explored by the Equatorial Guinea

government was the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). According to the EITI website (n.d.):

The EITI is a global standard that promotes revenue transparency and accountability in the extractive sector. It has a robust yet flexible methodology for monitoring and reconciling company payments and government revenues from oil, gas and mining at the country level.

In other words, it is “designed to reduce the theft of revenues from the production of oil, gas, and other natural resources by establishing uniform accounting standards and a mechanism for monitoring production company payment and government receipts” (Williams 2011:639). Ross (2008:6) argues that the EITI needs to go even further. This is because, “even though exporting governments are pressured to disclose the revenues they collect, they are not expected to reveal how they spend the money. Oil revenues often vanish into the nooks of state-owned oil companies or into governments’ off-budget accounts.” As a result, he suggests that the “EITI (or similar effort) [...] develop guidelines for the transparent allocation of all revenues from extractive industries” (Ross 2008:6). Equatorial Guinea joined the EITI as a candidate country on 27 September 2007 (EITI n.d.). Yates (2012:63), however, notes that as a “corrupt autocrat”, Equatorial Guinea’s “participation in EITI should be considered more as a diplomatic gesture toward foreign investors than a real commitment to revenue transparency.” Indeed, the voluntary nature of the EITI meant that the Equatorial Guinean government did not meet their deadline for completing EITI validation (EITI n.d.) and in April 2010, the request for an extension was refused (EITI 2010). Consequently, Human Rights Watch (2009:3) observe that “there is a serious policy disconnect between the official rhetoric and the reality on the ground in Equatorial Guinea.” The major failure of transparency initiatives such as EITI is that it is a voluntary process. According to Global Witness (2004:6) “this voluntary approach will not work in the majority of countries where it is most needed. [...] Massive financial improprieties [...] show that political and business elites currently have a vested interest in avoiding transparency.” Of course this is the central argument of Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) theory focusing on the ‘political instrumentalization of disorder’: profiting from the disordered nature of the state. After all, it is considerably easier to loot the state coffers if they are in a state of disarray. Consequently, it is not

in the interests of the elites to reform this system, which in its current chaotic guise serves them so well. It is also important to remember a key observation made by Chabal and Daloz (1999:xix) that:

To speak of disorder is not, of course, to speak of irrationality. It is merely to make explicit the observation that political action operates rationally, but largely in the realm of the informal, uncodified and unpoliced—that is, in a world that is not ordered in the sense in which we usually take our own politics in the West to be.

In a political arena where power is seen as being zero-sum and utilising state resources for self-enrichment as the primary goal it makes no sense to employ transparency initiatives to reform a system that currently works so well (as it is so profitable) for a member of the elite.

It is not just the corrupt regimes themselves that show a lack of commitment to transparency initiatives, but also their business partners; whether they be oil companies who provide the revenues, or banks who help stow them. A lack of transparency currently makes more business sense to them too. As the aforementioned Riggs Bank scandal showed, banks are not committed to employing due diligence measures when vetting potential customers. Indeed, a report by Global Witness (2009b:2) notes that, “while it is important that banks develop their own effective know-your-customer policies, [...] leaving banks to do it on their own without regulatory oversight will not work, because the avoidance of corrupt funds inevitably involves turning down potential business, and not all banks are willing to do this.” Furthermore, Global Witness (2009b:6) also advises that, “those governments that have committed themselves to making poverty history, and that claim to be pushing good governance and accountability through their aid interventions, are guilty of hypocrisy if they fail to take responsibility for how their financial institutions and the financial systems which they regulate are contributing to corruption and therefore poverty.” As the above discussion of human rights shows, however, rhetoric and reality in the case of Western governments dealings with regimes such as Equatorial Guinea are two very different things.

Industry competition and an overarching concern for profits is the main reason for oil companies failing to commit to initiatives that establish a culture of transparency. Human Rights Watch (2009:39) explains that the:

Contracts for two of the largest oil concessions in Equatorial Guinea, the Alba and Zafiro fields, were negotiated in 1990 and 1992 respectively, without outside consultation from the World Bank. The contracts were extremely favorable to the oil companies, both because of the actual financial terms of the agreement and because the government, given its limited institutional capacity, had trouble monitoring the complicated financial transactions required by the terms of the contract.

As it stands, “oil companies keep 80 per cent of oil revenues, and the government only 20 per cent. This is up from the original 13 per cent share that was renegotiated with World Bank assistance in 1998. It is also one of the world’s most attractive deals; regionally, it is only surpassed by the even lower country take of Chad” (Soares de Oliveira 2007:232). Indeed, Human Rights Watch (2009:39) notes that, “the [Equatorial Guinean] government would later claim to find \$88 million in payment discrepancies from companies, including ExxonMobil, between 1996 and 2001.” Whilst a key explanation for the poor contract terms negotiated by the Equatorial Guinean government is the simple desire to get rich, quick, there is a further issue that is a direct result of the dominant neo-patrimonial system. As a result of the misappropriation of public funds that should have been invested in education, there is a lack of a skilled workforce. Consequently, Soares de Oliveira (2007:232) observes, “there is the lack of local capacity in technical and regulatory terms. Technical dependence means that the country is utterly reliant on company expertise even for comparatively simple tasks. [...] It also means that companies can hold information about the oil sector that is very difficult for the government to acquire on its own. Moreover, regulatory insufficiencies result in company operations not being carefully audited, which expands opportunities for creative accountancy.” Therefore, the profitability of the oil sector is significantly hampered by the ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime in place. Until greater transparency is employed in all aspects of the Equatorial Guinean political and economic spheres and the extreme governance curse tackled, it will remain the case that, “the benefits of development remain

concentrated in the hands of a very small elite, [...] with very few trickle-down effects for the masses.” A significant increase in political will is needed from the Equatorial Guinean government, oil companies, partner countries, the banking industry and International Financial Institutions, amongst others, for the ‘lot’ of the ordinary Equatorial Guinean to improve; this sadly, is severely lacking.

#### **4.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This chapter set out to trace the entrenchment of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea under the presidency of Obiang Nguema (1979-present). Whilst initially there was great hope that Obiang really was the ‘liberator’ of the Equatorial Guinean people, as Decalo (1998:103) observed, it is not possible to provide a “postmortem of dictatorship” in the case of Equatorial Guinea. Even if Equatorial Guinea under Obiang could be said to have “turned over a new leaf, it is still on the same branch as the old. Obiang retains the final word” (Fegley 1989:231). From the investigation of political and economic realities in Equatorial Guinea since the discovery of oil in the mid-1990s it is very much apparent that President Obiang Nguema and the kinsmen and cronies who compose his patronage network have entrenched a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime. Such a regime is characterised by a complete lack of “dissociation between public office and the ruler’s private interests” (Bach 2012:31). Silverstein (2006) illustrates this point well when he describes how, “Obiang treats Equatorial Guinea's national treasury like his personal checking account.” Consequently, the underdeveloped nature of the Equatorial Guinean state, represented by the monumental gap between GDP per capita figures and the country's low position in the UNDP Human Development Index is the sole responsibility of the Nguema regime. This is because development policies which benefit the populace as a whole, are not in keeping with the financial self-interest of those in power (Mills 2010:16).

Since the discovery of oil Equatorial Guinea has been widely considered to be suffering from a ‘resource curse’ as the vast revenues accrued through oil export have not served to improve the everyday lives of the ordinary citizens; in fact if anything,

their 'lot' has worsened. It is, however, apparent from the in-depth study of Equatorial Guinea produced thus far that as argued by Clarke (2010), oil itself is not the problem. It is in fact a broader *governance curse* that Equatorial Guinea is suffering from—oil has only fuelled the existing problem. This argument is supported by McSherry (2006:24) who insists that, “oil has exacerbated already present pathologies in Equatorial Guinea’s political economy, paving the way for a future of underdevelopment, instability and authoritarian rule.” As is apparent from the preceding chapter on the rule of Macías Nguema (1968-1979) neo-patrimonialism was already a significant issue in Equatorial Guinea and it has just become further entrenched and unrestrained under the rule of Obiang Nguema. This is particularly apparent through the extravagant spending habits displayed by members of the regime, most notably his son and widely expected successor, Teodorín.

This chapter has also highlighted the central role that external actors play in perpetuating the system of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea. It is clear that good governance rhetoric propounded by Western states becomes rather hollow when considered in light of their continued partnership with the regime in order to secure access to oil. This is particularly apparent in the case of the US. Their need to find an alternative source of oil to the increasingly temperamental Middle East, means that they are prepared to turn a blind eye to human rights abuses. This is clearly evident in the US decision to reopen their embassy in Malabo in 2003, despite no improvement being seen in conditions there (Taylor 2010:138). Moreover, voluntary transparency initiatives are significantly undermined by the lack of commitment by oil companies and banks to shed light on money paid to the Equatorial Guinean government for oil or the subsequent storing of these funds; enabling capital flight. The lack of accountability displayed enables the continuance of corrupt practices by a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime, such as that of Obiang Nguema. Until there is greater condemnation of the (illegal) practices of the Nguema regime, there can be little hope for improvements in development indicators in Equatorial Guinea. In GDP per capita terms and oil company literature, Equatorial Guinea may now be ‘the Kuwait of Africa’, but for the ordinary citizen the reality is more akin to a diplomat’s verdict that it is in fact “a festering pustule in the armpit of Africa” (quoted in Shaxson 2008:29).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

*In the past few years, Equatorial Guinea, population 500,000, has become the third-largest oil exporter in sub-Saharan Africa, after Nigeria and Angola. Per capita, it is one of the richest countries on the continent; rated by how much money ends up in the pockets of people not related to the president, it remains one of the poorest.*

Peter Maas, *A Touch of Crude*, 2005.

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This study has been concerned with finding an explanation for the situation described in Maas' quotation. Why is it that the World Bank's 2013 World Development Indicators (WDI) found that countries with the highest levels of extreme poverty also tend to be amongst the richest in terms of natural resource reserves (Guigale 2013)? Why is it that Equatorial Guinea boasts the highest GDP per capita on the African continent according to the World Bank (2013); yet, it languishes at 136 out of a total of 187 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index (2013)? The aim of this thesis has been to highlight the dire situation that is currently experienced by the ordinary people of Equatorial Guinea. Whilst the president and his family may be able to spend millions of US dollars on real estate and supercars, 70% of his people struggle to get by on less than \$2 a day (Europa 2012:1673). The reason for this vast disparity in wealth and resultant inequality is attributable to the neo-patrimonial regime that is entrenched in Equatorial Guinea. The commonly-held belief of the few that have heard of this small state in 'the armpit' of West Africa is that it is suffering from a 'resource curse'—struggling to deal with its new-found, unprecedented level of wealth. Instead, this thesis has argued that it is rather a *governance curse* that Equatorial Guinea is being decimated by and that oil has in fact only exacerbated existing pathologies in its political economy (McSherry 2006:24). This has been achieved by tracing the introduction and normalisation of a system of neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea. It has shown that the flawed nature of the

political system was already in evidence prior to independence being granted in 1968, developed under the crazed dictatorship of Macías Nguema (1968-1979) and became entrenched under the excesses of the “worst dictator in Africa” (Maas 2008); Obiang Nguema (1979-present) to the extent that neo-patrimonialism is now, clearly the *modus operandi* of politics in Equatorial Guinea. This chapter will now trace the development of the thesis and summarise its findings in order to highlight the answers to the research questions and hypothesis articulated in chapter one. Finally, it will provide recommendations on future research and potential further studies; in an attempt to predict what may lie ahead for Equatorial Guinea.

## **5.2 THE PROGRESS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

With the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (2013) acting as a springboard to the study, the following research question was formulated as an attempt to provide an understanding of the situation in Equatorial Guinea: How did neo-patrimonialism take hold in Equatorial Guinea and how does this system explain the desperate state of the country today?

In order to answer this question, it was first necessary to provide a detailed definition of the theory of neo-patrimonialism. This was conceptualised through an extensive literature review in chapter two, before a theoretical framework was introduced that could then be applied in the subsequent chapters in order to provide a rigorous analysis of the situation that Equatorial Guinea is in today and how this state developed over time; from its roots in the Spanish colonial administration. The theoretical framework adopted was comprised of two elements: (i) the theory of ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regimes (Bach 2012; Bavister-Gould 2011) and; (ii) the theory of the ‘political instrumentalization of disorder’ (Chabal and Daloz 1999). These two theories were chosen as they provided the greatest potential for the analysis of the regime in Equatorial Guinea. The central aspect of a ‘predatory’ neo-patrimonial regime is that “personal rule and control of resources reach a paroxysmic level. [... And therefore] the idea of a dissociation between public office and the ruler’s private interests tends to become irrelevant” (Bach 2012:30-31). In essence, this theoretical framework can be used to explain what is happening in Equatorial

Guinea. It also serves to classify when a ‘predatory’ level of neo-patrimonialism has been achieved (see Bavister-Gould 2011:1-2 list of characteristics in chapter two). This is vital according to Bach (2012:29) as he believes that neo-patrimonialism is seen in two forms: ‘regulated’ and ‘predatory’. Whilst not an ideal form, the fact that “regulated neopatrimonialism is capped and ringfenced” may make it the lesser of two evils. A differentiation between the two forms is therefore desirable. From using Bach’s (2012) and Bavister-Gould’s (2011) theoretical framework to establish an idea of what is taking place in Equatorial Guinea, Chabal and Daloz’s (1999) theory of the ‘the instrumentalization of disorder’ can be employed to explain why it has become entrenched and endured for so long. In summary, it is because it works in the eyes of the elites. The state is at its *most effective* for them when it is at its *most ineffective* in the eyes of the outside world (Chabal and Daloz 1999:14). In other words, “its usefulness is greatest when it is least institutionalized” (Chabal and Daloz 1999:14). Such a state of affairs, explains why the ruling elites in states such as Equatorial Guinea show little desire to work to reform the system. Chabal and Daloz (1999:104) note that “such a state of affairs may not be desirable in the long term for the country as a whole [... But] it remains both entirely coherent and eminently reasonable for those Africans who can manage to benefit from the system as it *works*.” A final, key observation of Chabal and Daloz (1999:xix) is that whilst the system in states such as Equatorial Guinea may be disordered it is not irrational—“political action operates rationally, but largely in the realm of the informal, uncodified and unpoliced—that is in a world not ordered in the sense in which we usually take our own polities in the West to be.” In fact, the neo-patrimonial system in Equatorial Guinea is an intentional rejection of the Western system. Such a theoretical framework is essential in order to understand the endurance of the Nguema regime in Equatorial Guinea. Why would they want to change a system which works so well for them, and from which they profit so handsomely?

The remainder of the thesis was focused on the application of this combined theoretical framework through a chronological exploration of the development of the Nguema regime and the resultant explanation of how neo-patrimonialism developed, became normalised and consequently entrenched over time. Chapter three began by

tracing the roots of neo-patrimonialism which were sown by the Spanish colonial administration. The different levels of colonisation experienced and development enacted meant that upon being granted independence in 1968, Equatorial Guinea was not a unified state and as a result it was easy for Macías Nguema to practice a policy of divide-and-rule in order to secure his presidency and eliminate opposition elements. It was this section that answered the first sub-research question posed: How did the Spanish colonial legacy provide the conditions for neo-patrimonialism to develop in Equatorial Guinea? The favouring of the island-based clans of the Fernandino and Bubi by the Spanish, created an inferiority complex in Macías that was to have a devastating effect. It planted the seed for his regime to be based on avenging his oppressors. Regarded by Maas (2005) as a hybrid of Pol Pot and Idi Amin, Macías' regime can be summed up as "one of the 20th century's most brutal genocides" yet tragically, for its people "no foreign power except for Equatorial Guinea's former colonial ruler paid attention to it, and the fascist regime of Spain's Francisco Franco was not overly troubled by human rights abuses." The madness of Macías resulted in Equatorial Guinea being regarded as one of the most tragic failures of newly-independent Africa. His rule rivalled only Bokassa in the Central African Republic and Idi Amin in Uganda. Overall, this chapter provided a detailed insight into how neo-patrimonialism began to develop in Equatorial Guinea and how Macías rule was an archetypal example of both Bach's (2012) and Bavister-Gould's (2011) theory of a 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime.

Finally, chapter four focused upon Macías' successor, Obiang Nguema, who overthrew his uncle in a military coup d'état in August 1979. In power ever since, Obiang has (since the fall of Gaddafi) become the longest-serving African president; and according to Bloomfield (2007) amongst others, one of the continent's worst despots (even worse than Mugabe, if Maas (2008) is to be believed). Indeed, Maas (2008) notes that although Macías was a tough act to follow (having liquidated approximately one-third of the population during his eleven years in power), Obiang's could be seen as the "Switzerland of dictatorships—so effective at enforcing obedience that the spectacle of unrest is invisible." This is not the only link between Equatorial Guinea and Switzerland that can be made when analysing Obiang's tenure.

Indeed, it is widely-thought that millions of the country's vast oil revenues are stashed off-shore in Swiss bank accounts (after the regime was forced to empty their US-based Riggs Bank account following a US Senate investigation into money laundering and capital flight). The excessive and flagrant spending of the Obiang regime, in particular his playboy son (and widely-touted successor), Teodoro serves as a prime example (coupled with the extreme human rights abuses, obsession with the cult of personality and constitutional adaptation) of how Nguema has entrenched neo-patrimonialism in Equatorial Guinea to the extent that it has become the *modus operandi* for all state activities and to a large extent makes it a unique example of neo-patrimonialism in Africa (the answer to the second sub-research question).

So where does the money come from that sustains this 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime? "Oil—Black Gold—Texas Tea!" (Shaxson 2008:128). The latter half of chapter four examines the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea in the mid-1990s and how the resultant vast revenues have greased the neo-patrimonial machine already in place. Rejecting the dominant argument proposed that Equatorial Guinea suffers from a 'resource curse', this section argues that in fact it is a broader *governance curse* that is engulfing the country. As Clarke (2010:533) argues, "the root dilemma is found in the political apparatus, rather than in oil itself." Therefore, although oil can be blamed for sustaining the dire state of affairs in Equatorial Guinea, it is not to blame for their existence. As the previous sections illustrated, the neo-patrimonial regime was already entrenched before the discovery of oil. Its extraction has merely afforded the Nguema regime even greater revenues to service their patronage networks with and sustained and funded self-enrichment to the extent that the personal and legal-rational are indivisible, with a state of '*L'État c'est moi*' being displayed—the answer to the final sub-research question. To focus on the situation in Equatorial Guinea as evidence of a 'resource curse' is erroneous. The problems afflicting the country have existed for much longer than the US has been extracting oil for. Yet, it is only the discovery of oil that can really be thanked for bringing Equatorial Guinea to the attention of the world. As Maas (2005) wryly notes, "if America's interest in foreign countries were predicated on human rights, Equatorial Guinea would have seized our attention long before its 1995 oil boom." Yet, tragically it is not human rights that determines US (or

any of Equatorial Guinea's other partner countries for that matter) foreign policy; but rather their thirst for oil. Such a fact also accounts for why such a sorry state of affairs will endure in Equatorial Guinea for the foreseeable future; at least until the oil reserves are bled dry; or the state coffers by the Nguema regime, depending on which happens first!

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION**

As the limitations outlined in the introduction to this thesis made clear, due to the closed and repressive nature of the Nguema regime, the chances of undertaking primary research in Equatorial Guinea are extremely restricted. The secrecy surrounding the regime and the efficient terror network in place mean that fieldwork is likely to be cut short if the researcher is even allowed into the country. Consequently, future research is likely to need to be based on the examination of existing sources and statistics, as this study has been. If anything, it could be argued that due to the secretive nature of the Nguema regime and the resultant lack of attention that has been paid to this small state in 'the armpit' of West Africa warrants the necessity for further research being carried out to raise its profile and increase interest in it; only then can there be any hope of a change in regime being enacted.

A future study of a comparative nature could be conducted examining Equatorial Guinea in comparison to another oil rich state which has made a success of its oil wealth. Whilst the temptation may be to choose a state such as Norway, which is arguably the most successful examples of a state using its oil wealth for the betterment of the nation as a whole, it may well be more beneficial to use a state in the Middle-Eastern Gulf, for instance Kuwait. This is because Kuwait, like Equatorial Guinea is classed as a patrimonial state and does not fit with the Western liberal democratic ideal. Furthermore, a number of recent scholarly articles on Equatorial Guinea since the discovery of oil, have given it the moniker 'the Kuwait of Africa'; it would therefore be interesting and beneficial to investigate the similarities and differences between these two states. The vast wealth that the Kuwaiti state accrued through the total ownership of the oil industry, has enabled it to develop one of the richest patronage networks in the world along with the most comprehensive welfare

system. Through such provisions it has been possible for the ruling family in Kuwait to both reward supporters and most importantly pay-off opponents. Moreover, the welfare system in Kuwait is credited with substantially reducing the basis for social and economic unrest. As a result of the high rents accumulated from oil production it is unnecessary to tax the citizens and therefore the regime is not only able to stem opposition by providing education, healthcare, property and heavily subsidised energy commodities, but also by not taxing their citizens, the Kuwaiti regime is freer from accountability for their actions, most notably a lack of democratic practices. Whilst the political situation in Kuwait is in no way ideal by Western democratic standards, it does perhaps occupy a middle ground that the Nguema regime in Equatorial Guinea could be encouraged to adopt. Although, as Chabal and Daloz's (1999) theory of the 'political instrumentalization of disorder' makes clear, such a move seems unlikely, as the current system serves their self-enrichment purpose so well.

An additional element for investigation and one which was touched upon in chapter four (space constraints inhibited further attention) is the role of external factors in contributing to and helping to sustain the 'predatory' neo-patrimonial regime in Equatorial Guinea. A deeper investigation into international complacency and the aiding and abetting of the Nguema regime by those who have a stake in and profit from the state as it is now (for instance, oil companies, the US, China and the international banking industry) would be beneficial. There is a tendency to point the finger at Equatorial Guinea and declare it 'the worst country in the world' etc., but as the brief section in chapter four highlighted, it takes two (if not more) to tango and Western critics in particular, perhaps need to look closer to home for the answer as to why Equatorial Guinea remains such an extreme example of a neo-patrimonial regime. Of course, the role of power politics, the anarchic international system (which makes enforceable transparency initiatives and regulatory frameworks more difficult to introduce), China's disregard for human rights and the dominant neo-liberal order dominated by the US thirst for oil are likely to hamper such efforts.

#### 5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The central focus of this study has been to explore and explain how neo-patrimonialism has developed and become entrenched in Equatorial Guinea to the extent that such a system of governance has become the *modus operandi*. The study has shown why a theoretical framework grounded in neo-patrimonialism is *the* central explanation for how politics plays out in Equatorial Guinea and that such a system has created a *governance curse* which has enveloped the state, rather than the more-commonly touted ‘resource curse’. As a consequence of completing this research it is possible to accept the following hypothesis, which was articulated in the introductory chapter: A political culture of neo-patrimonialism has been developed and become entrenched in Equatorial Guinea to the extent that it is now the *modus operandi* and is responsible for the underdevelopment of the country that has been observed since gaining independence from Spain in 1968. Although the discovery of vast oil reserves in the 1990s has resulted in vast wealth being accrued, this prosperity has only been captured by the small elite that characterises the system of neo-patrimonialism: as a result, vast wealth disparity exists. Neo-patrimonialism, therefore, is the key explanation for the extreme discrepancy between Equatorial Guinea’s GDP per capita income—32 (World Bank 2011) —and its ranking on the UNDP HDI—136 out of 187 countries (UNDP 2013)—a difference of 104; making it one of the most unequal societies in the world. As such, those heralding Equatorial Guinea as the ‘Kuwait of Africa’ are misguided; it is still the sweaty, armpit of Africa that it always has been: and such is the nature of the Nguema regime that it looks to remain so for the foreseeable future.

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