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Between Three Continents: Rethinking Equatorial Guinea on the Fortieth Anniversary of Its Independence from Spain
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“Wa kobo abe, wa kobo politik”: Three Decades of Social Paralysis and Political Immobility in Equatorial Guinea

“Wa kobo abe, wa kobo politik” can be literally translated as “you’re bad-mouthing; you’re talking politics,” but, as anybody
who has ever tried to translate certain expressions into a different language realizes, literal translations are often meaningless or
confusing. One is then forced to either look for a less literal translation, or to provide a background explanation. The latter is what
this paper seeks to do. Wa kobo abe, wa kobo politik

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own ambition s, h e h ad to suspe ct th at h aving ove rth rown th e f orme r d ictator would not make h im le gitimate f or too long. T h e

se curing of loyalty was, th e re f ore , a priority if h e wante d to avoid th e same f ate as h is uncle . F rom th is pe rspe ctive , we must

un d e rstand th e patrimonialization of th e state as a two-way proce ss th at allows th e appropriation of state asse t td (t)-(at)-(e)-1(akO (h)-((d (t’(h)-(e)-1

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The Equatorial-Guinean state is more repressive and effective than the colonial one. African sovereign states enjoy much
broader international legitimacy than their predecessors, and this is often translated into carte blanche to commit all sorts of
abuses. The army is not an institution for the defence of the Equatorial-Guinean people against external attacks, but its main
purpose is to protect the position and privileges of Obiang Nguema. Not surprisingly, the December 2007 attack and
robbery of two banks in Bata by alleged members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was not
repelled by the armed forces, whereas the latest attack of February 2009 on the presidential palace in Malabo was repelled.
By and large, the population fears an army that is identified as the brutal side of the regime. Brutality, however, is not an exclusive
attribute of the army. For the past thirty years the country has witnessed a proliferation of security bodies – military, paramilitary,
and police. Any visitor to Equatorial Guinea is immediately struck by the amount of people in all types of uniforms on the streets
of Malabo or Bata.
Nonetheless, the most effective use of brutality against the Equatorial-Guinean population is not exercised by people in
uniform, but in civil clothes. I am referring to no other than the ominous Seguridad (Security). The elusive character of this
repressive body makes it particularly hard to understand its exact nature and functions, but it would be fair to compare it to some
sort of internal secret service. Its effectiveness does not rely on its sophisticated methods or resources, but on a much less

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changes of the last hundred years, still carries a very important weight. The series of mutual obligations that tie family members
together are almost unavoidable, given that the person is defined as such in relation to the broader family group. To be an
opositor does not only mean a rejection of the figure of Obiang Nguema, but, most importantly, it amounts to betray one’s own
family.