



Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and the management of Equatoguinean Refugees from 1960 to 1979¹

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Abstract

From the colonial period to the end of the dictatorial regime of Macías Nguema in Equatorial Guinea, many Equatoguineans were forced into exile by the authorities of that state. Anti-colonial struggles and the repression by Macías Nguema caused a massive influx of refugees into Cameroon. Some of these refugees worked in Cameroonian plantations. The Spanish colonial authorities in Equatorial Guinea accused the government of Cameroon of exploiting their citizens in their various industrial plantations in Bandjock and Akonolinga. The Cameroonian government, in response, denied having used the refugees in contravention of international laws. This article analyzes the presence of Equatoguinean refugees in Cameroon as well as the controversy and tensions surrounding their use in industrial plantations in Cameroon between 1960 and 1979. It concludes that while allegations of abuse of Equatoguineans in Cameroonian industrial plantations are difficult to substantiate, there is evidence that Cameroon did provide support for anti-colonial and dissident Equatoguinean exiles, which negatively affected the relations of the governments of President Ahidjo and Macías Nguema.

Keywords: forced labour, Equatoguinean refugees, industrial plantations, Cameroon

Résumé

De la période coloniale à la fin du régime dictatorial de Nguema, en Guinée équatoriale, de nombreux Équato-guinéens ont été contraints à l'exil par les autorités de cet État. Les luttes anticoloniales et la répression de Macías Nguema a provoqué un afflux massif de réfugiés au Cameroun. Certains de ces réfugiés travaillaient dans les plantations camerounaises. Les autorités coloniales espagnoles en Guinée équatoriale ont accusé le gouvernement camerounais d'exploiter leurs citoyens dans les plantations industrielles de Bandjock et

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d'Akonolinga. Le gouvernement camerounais, en réponse, a nié l'utilisation, en violation des lois internationales, des réfugiés. Cet article analyse la présence de réfugiés équato-guinéens au Cameroun ainsi que la controverse et les tensions entourant leur utilisation dans les plantations industrielles au Cameroun, entre 1960 et 1979. Il conclut que, bien que les allégations d'abus sur des équato-guinéens dans les plantations industrielles camerounaises soient difficiles à corroborer, il est prouvé que le Cameroun a effectivement apporté son soutien aux exilés, anticolonialistes et dissidents équato-guinéens, ce qui a nui aux relations entre les gouvernements des présidents Ahidjo et Ahidjo et Macías Nguema.

Mots-clés : travail forcé, réfugiés équatoguinéens, plantations industrielles, Cameroun

Introduction

From the colonial period to the end of the dictatorial regime of Macías Nguema (1968-1979) in Equatorial Guinea, many Equatoguineans were forced into exile by the authorities of this state. The main host countries of Equatoguinean refugees were Gabon, Cameroon and Nigeria in Africa and Spain in Europe, because of the historical ties, and the linguistic and cultural proximity between these countries. Cameroon, because of its geographical proximity, its ease of access, its ethnic links with Equatorial Guinea and its economic prosperity, was initially the main destination for Equatoguinean refugees until the end of Macías Nguema's regime. The situation of Spanish-Guinean refugees in Cameroon during the colonial period forced the country to set up a management strategy for these exiles that included the provision of humanitarian assistance, resettlement, employment and support for political groups. Equatorial Guinea, wary of Cameroonian support for dissident political groups, contested the country's method of managing their Equatoguinean refugees. This article analyzes the controversy around the presence and governance of Equatoguinean refugees in Cameroon between 1960 and 1979. It seeks to answer the following questions: what were the historical developments that created the different waves of Equatoguinean refugees between 1960–1979? How did the Cameroon authorities manage Equatoguinean refugees in its territory? Why did their management generate controversy and tensions with Equatorial Guinea? This article, based on relevant literature on Equatorial Guinean history and archival materials, is structured around two key points. First, it introduces the fundamentals of the problems of Equatoguinean refugees; secondly, it presents the points of controversy between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea vis-à-vis the management of refugees.

Equatorial Guinea, Africa, the UN and refugees

The presence of refugees in Africa is one of the most visible consequences of the conflicts that have plagued the continent for the past fifty years. As Milner (2009:1) indicates,

Images of refugees pouring across borders to escape persecution, mass human rights violations and conflict, huddled in camps and surrounded by the flags of international aid agencies, have put a human face on issues as complex and abstract as the collapse of a state.

Since the independence of African states in the late 1950s and early 1960s, millions of refugees have fled from conflicts, authoritarian regimes and state failure in their countries. Many Africans have suffered from and been pushed into exile by the negative effects of postcolonial misrule (Veney 2007:4). There is no doubt that authoritarian regimes have been, and still continue to be, one of the most significant causes of this movement of refugees in Africa. However, the problem of refugees has not solely been generated locally or created by Africans. Superpower rivalry and proxy wars during the Cold War, intransigent former colonial powers, and the repressive Apartheid regime in South Africa have also contributed to the ranks of refugees in the continent.

Despite intensifying in the postcolonial period, the refugee problem in Africa is not new; it has existed since the colonial period. As far back as 1951, the United Nations had to create a convention and a protocol on the refugees. The UN convention and its protocol define a refugee as:

...any person who: (1) Has been considered a refugee under the Arrangements of 12 May 1926 and 30 June 1928 or under the Conventions of 28 October 1933 and 10 February 1938, the Protocol of 14 September 1939 or the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization; Decisions of non-eligibility taken by the International Refugee Organization during the period of its activities shall not prevent the status of refugee being accorded to persons who fulfil the conditions of paragraph 2 of this section...

(2) As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. In the case of a person who has more than one nationality, the term 'the country of his nationality' shall mean each of the countries of which he is a national, and a person shall not be deemed to be lacking the protection of the country of his nationality if, without any valid reason

based on well-founded fear, he has not availed himself of the protection of one of the countries of which he is a national (UN Convention 1951).

The 1951 Convention provides the most comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees at the international level. It laid down the minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, and the rights to which they are entitled. Such refugee rights include their protection by the hosting state. The OAU convention of 1969 on refugees was basically a rewritten version of the UN convention, with sections indicating that it took into account previous international texts on the issue of refugees in the world being excised. In the OAU Convention, the definition of refugee applies to:

1. Every person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.
2. The term 'refugee' shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality (OAU Convention 1969, Article 1).

The refugee issue in Equatorial Guinea did not arise from race. Nearly all the inhabitants of this country are Bantu in ethnicity, culture and language, with only a minority of 1 per cent which does not belong to this group. Religious belief and persecution were also not major causes of the disaffection or crisis in Equatorial Guinea, since nearly 100 per cent professes to be Christian. Finally, no one was finally forced into exile because of their nationality, because in Equatorial Guinea, 'no case of this kind happened' according to Eya Nchama (1982a). So what specifically are the causes of the refugee crisis in Equatorial Guinea? At the Dakar conference on refugees in 1982, Eya Nchama contended that they were:

The effects of colonialism, violation of human rights, economic problems, apartheid, civil or international wars and natural disasters. In the specific case of Equatorial Guinea, one can retain the first two causes, namely the effects of colonialism and the violation of human rights (1982a).

Spanish colonial repression, decolonization, and the origins of Equatoguinean refugees

The process of decolonization of Equatorial Guinea had two major phases. The first period (1947–1964) covered from the first nationalist demands to internal autonomy. The second stage of the decolonization (1964–1968) encompassed the period of internal autonomy and the organization of the elections, which enabled the establishment of the first government of Independent Equatorial Guinea. After 1945, the paternalistic, segregationist and repressive character of the colonial Spain regime in Equatorial Guinea favoured a nationalist revival. In 1947, the main proponent of revivalist nationalism, King Boncoro III (Santiago Buganda), denounced Spanish colonial abuses as well as the colonial treaties signed with Spaniards in 1843 (Pélissier 1966:76-77). Marcos Ropo Uri² first articulated the requirements for independence in 1947. The disappointment of African auxiliary teachers in the face of the refusal to align their salaries with those of other categories of civil servants led to the creation of the Cruzada Nacional de Liberación in 1952, under the direction of Acacio Mañe Ela, with the support of Ropo Uri (Liniger-Goumaz 1986:72). During the same year, workers' strikes led to a bloody crackdown which later led to the assassination of a number of nationalists.

Equatoguineans who demanded independence from Spain were forced into exile by the Spanish colonial authorities. Many Equatoguineans ended up in neighbouring countries. Spanish colonial repression caused a massive influx of refugees in Cameroon and Gabon (Eya Nchama 1982b:82). The Cruzada spearheaded anti-colonial activities until Spain decided to transform Spanish Guinea into a Spanish province. It was in La Cruzada that politicians such as Ndongo Miyone, Ateba Nsoh, and Torao Sikara were politically active. On 20 November 1958 the Spanish priest Nocolas Presboste of the mission of Bata, knew the hiding place of Acasio Mañe Ela and delivered him to the Spanish civil guard who assassinated him. His body 'was thrown into the sea with a stone hanging from his neck' (Nsah-Voundy 1990:123). The denunciation of Mañe Ela by the Spanish priest struck the collective consciousness of Equatorial Guinea. One year after the assassination of Mañe Ela, Enrique Mvo Okenve was also assassinated on 21 November 1959 by the colonial administration. In 1959, nationalist parties of Equatorial Guinea were created abroad (in Cameroon and Gabon).

After the United Nations had admitted Spain in 1955, in accordance with Article 73 of the Charter, it had to inform the General Secretariat on the social and cultural condition of its colony, as well as its development. Petitions from the Equatorial Guinean populations at the UN sparked the anger of colonial powers which began to hunt and harass the liberation movements.

The borders were monitored by the Spanish Civil Guard who penetrated the territories of neighbouring countries to prosecute the nationalists. Until 1959, Spain practiced,

... towards the colonies the worst classical methods of colonialism in Iberia: the systematic use of forced labour, the policy of assimilation and settlement, and the strict limitation of the education of the African populations at the level of primary education. The policy of total isolation of the colony to avoid any rise of nationalist movements, does not favour the cultural flourishing of the populations of Equatorial Guinea and their contact with the outside world. In Equatorial Guinea, any movement of the native is regulated and severely controlled by the use of safe conduct (Agence de Presse Espagne Populaire 1969).

Pressed by the imminent wave of independence of African countries and fearing the interference of the UN in Equatorial Guinean affairs, Franco's government decided to exclude Equatorial Guinea from 'interference by the United Nations'. The Act of 30 July 1959 abolished the Spanish territories of the Gulf of Guinea and substituted, for them, the status of the Spanish provinces of the Gulf of Guinea. This so-called provincialization law allowed Spain's statements to reduce the economic and cultural divides between the metropolis and Spanish Guinea. In reality, the aim of the provincialization was to put an end to the debates which had taken place since 1957 at the United Nations on the independence of Spanish Guinea (Dominguez 1976). Having become a Spanish province by means of this text, Spanish Guinea would henceforth come under the 'internal problems' of Spain. It would no longer fall within the competence of the UN Decolonization Committee (Moran 1980:372).

With the provincialization of Spanish Guinea in 1959, the colony was divided into two distinct provinces: the Rio Muni Continental Province and the Fernando Poo/Annobon Maritime Province (Liniger-Goumaz 1986:73). In order to control the provincial assemblies, the metropolis designated two Europeans to head two institutions whose professional associations were controlled by the metropolis which elected 75 per cent of the members. The repression of the nationalists was very harsh, with 2,941 political incarcerations in 1958 (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:58). The colonial administration had to make concessions:

... the preparation of the internal autonomy regime of Equatorial Guinea, acceptance under the pressure of the government of Cameroon of the principle of the official recognition of nationalist movements (Liniger-Goumaz 1986:73).

With the provincialization, the pressure of the nationalists led Spain to grant internal autonomy to Spanish Guinea. Under UN pressure, a status of autonomy was elaborated by Spain. Delegations of the economic and ethnic groups of the two provinces of the Gulf of Guinea took part in the discussions. Autonomy was finally granted to Spanish Guinea on 15 December 1963 through the law of autonomy. Until 1964, at the beginning of the autonomy, the Spanish Government did not tolerate the various anti-colonial and nationalist movements, which explains the exile of many independence fighters.

The last move towards the independence of Spanish Guinea was marked by internal autonomy, the formalization of nationalist political parties and the Constitutional Conference, as well as the election of the president of the Republic. When the Autonomy Act was passed, both provinces were given self-administration for internal matters. Consequently, Spanish Guinea no longer contributed theoretically to the financing of the Spanish State, since its own income was in principle reinvested on the spot without prejudice to subsidies from the central State. A four-year development plan was drawn up (Liniger-Goumaz 1986:73).

During this period, Spanish authorities continued to persecute the Hispano-Guineans. Thus, in 1965, Spanish soldiers, pursuing nationalists, entered the territory and arrested three Cameroonian soldiers. Spanish Guinea, however, remained subject to the control of the Spanish Government, and all decisions of the Hispano-Guinean Parliament (*Asamblea general*) were subject to the veto of the *Comisario General* (replacing the *Governor General*). The autonomy granted to Spanish Guinea introduced some collective liberties such as the authorization of political parties, the organization of a constitutional conference. Political parties that were formerly fought by the colonial power were allowed to settle in the country and participate in political life. After the visit on 19 August 1966 by a committee of the UN Decolonization Committee, Spain, anxious to negotiate its admission to the Common Market and to resolve the Gibraltar affair, organized the Constitutional Conference in Madrid on 30 October 1967.

The adoption of the new Constitution resulted in the election of the very first president of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on 29 September 1968. For the elections, the dissidents of the *Secretaria conjunto* became the *Grupo Macías*. The candidates were Ondo Edu for the *Movimiento de Unión Nacional de la Guinea Ecuatorial* (MUNGE), Bosio Dioco for *Union Bubi, Ndongo Miyone* for *Movimiento Nacional de la Liberación de la Guinea* (MONALIGE) and Macías Nguéma for the MUNGE, the *Idea Popular de la Guinea Ecuatorial* (IPGE), and the dissident coalition, *Grupo Macías*. Macías Nguéma was easily elected in the second round by 68,310 votes against 41,258 for Ondo Edu. A UN observer mission recognized the vote as open, regular and

transparent. In parliament, out of thirty-five deputies, only nine belonged to the coalition of the dissidents of Grupo Macías. On the other hand, in the Council of Ministers, seven were members of the Macías team. On 12 October 1968, Macías Nguéma took the oath as the first President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. His dictatorial regime would force many Equatoguineans into exile in neighbouring countries, including Cameroon.

The Nguema dictatorship and continuation of the Equatoguinean Refugee crisis

The Spanish interference in politics in postcolonial Equatorial Guinea and the legacies of colonial-forced labour in plantations were part of the transformation of Macias Nguéma into a dictator. Spain set a particularly brutal example of undemocratic government. Macias Nguéma built on the Spanish colonial framework of running a regime that defied international standards of human right and the rule of law. After the unsuccessful coup d'état against him in March 1969, Macias Nguéma outlawed all political parties and created a single party, the *Partido Único Nacional* (PUN)³. The single party later changed its name into *Partido Único Nacional de Trabajadores* (PUNT). Macias strengthened his repression apparatus by creating at the same time a paramilitary force constituting of the PUNT's youth wing, called *Juventud en Marcha con Macias*. This force was composed of party members between the ages of 7 and 30 years⁴. The legal framework of repression was strengthened on 7 May 1971 by the decree 415/71 that regularized this situation by repealing certain articles of the Constitution⁵. That decree worsened the political situation by giving divine power to Macias Nguéma. He became the Head of the legislature, executive and judiciary (Cronjé 1976). He therefore assumed the prerogatives of the Council of the Republic. Nguéma also pushed the passing of the law 1/1971 of October 1971 that established penalties, including capital punishment, for offences against the President of the Republic, his government and the territory integrity of Equatorial Guinea. On 14 July 1972 Nguéma used the 1/72 decree to proclaimed himself President for Life, Head of the Nation and the Party, Commandant-in-Chief of the Army, and Grand Master of Education, Science and Culture⁶. The independence constitution was abolished and a new one was presented, approved and adopted by a referendum organized by PUNT. This constitution gave Nguéma the right to dissolve the National Assembly and call fresh elections. It also gave the right to Nguéma to nominate and dismiss all judges. These developments became part of the deep roots of institutionalized violence and dictatorship in Equatorial Guinea, which resulted in widespread political oppression and murder.

Macias Nguéma banned religious freedom, accusing religious authorities of having helped colonialists to dominate Equatorial Guinea. He forbade religious gatherings across the country. The paramilitary force of PUNT was charged to watch the 'subversive' activities of Catholics and other missionaries in Equatorial Guinea. These missionaries could be arrested, and like any other Equatoguineans brought to court and judged on grounds of subversion⁷. With institutionalized violence, torture and murder became commonplace in Equatorial Guinea. Macias Nguéma eliminated nearly all Equatoguinean intellectuals. By the end of 1974, more than two-third of the members of the 1968 Assembly, including nationalists who fought for the independence of Equatorial Guinea, had disappeared (Cronjé 1976:21). Bonifacio Ondo Edu was killed by Macias' forces. He was the Head of the Autonomous Government of 1964 and had challenged Macias Nguema in the presidential elections of 1968. Macias Nguema's regime pushed political and social repression in Equatorial Guinea to the extreme, undertaking extensive arbitrary detentions, political assassinations and summary executions.

The massive post-independence exile of Equatoguineans began with Nguema's regime. Many of these exiles went to Gabon and Cameroon. Systematic prosecution against intellectuals, executives and severe national economic deterioration caused the exile of thousands of Equatoguineans. The first Equatoguineans to flee their country under Macias Nguema were certainly those who feared for their lives because of political persecution, that is to say, intellectuals, executives and well-known activists of political parties of the opposition. They are the ones we call political refugees, regardless of whether they are recognized as such or not, in their host country. Macias feared that the presence of such a large number of refugees abroad could constitute a threat to his security and ordered the arrest of some of them by his intelligence agents. They were captured, brought back to Equatorial Guinea and executed. Most of the information on Equatorial Guinea was given by refugees living abroad. According to the *Alianza Nacional de restauración Democrática* (ANRD), a political movement of Equatoguineans living abroad, a quarter of the country's population was living in exile in 1976.

The rapid economic deterioration of the country also created another wave of refugees, as Equatoguineans took the path of exile in search of better living conditions for all those fleeing the total absence of labour guarantees and widespread misery. They became what are now labelled economic refugees. Whether driven by political repression or economic necessity, all Equatoguineans who abandoned the country automatically became the 'subversive' enemies of the regime and thus of the country and, therefore, were subject to heavier penalties including death if they were found in Equatorial Guinea. The simple fact of having relatives in neighbouring

Gabon and Cameroon was liable to prosecution. This fear still exists in the minds of many Equatoguineans living abroad.

Thousands of Equatoguineans went into exile, not only in Africa but also in Spain. Almost a quarter of Equatorial Guinea's population or around 100,000 people⁸ left Equatorial Guinea between 1970s and late 1990s (Aixelà 2012). Those who settled in Spain were integrated into a society in which the dictatorship of Francisco Franco still weighed and where experience in receiving immigrants was scarce. Their new context lacked government support and sensibility, while at the same time silencing the atrocities committed by the Macías Nguema regime in Guinea. The people and families who went abroad hoped to find a better future and only a small part thought they could return in a short time to resume their life in the country.

A small group of Guineans, who were in Spain completing their studies at the onset of independence and the Nguema dictatorship, found themselves in precarious and delicate circumstances. Nguema urged them to return, on pain of losing Guinean nationality. However they knew that returning to a country where indiscriminate state violence reigned would be unsafe. Most of these students lost contact with their families, not knowing if they were alive or dead. Families assumed that they would survive in a Spain that did not protect them from the loss of scholarships and economic precariousness. In fact, some had stateless status for a brief period because of the lack of commitment of the Spanish government to help them. In Spain, particularly, but also in Europe and the world in general there were many Equatoguineans; students and newly trained civil servants, who were stuck abroad by post-independence developments in their country.

The repression and instability in Equatorial Guinea led Equatoguinean students, civil servants and other exiles to settle permanently in their other countries. Spain was also the preferred destination of those who had studied in other countries, such as Egypt, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cuba, Venezuela and the countries of the former Eastern European bloc. Three groups of post-independence Equatoguinean refugees could be discerned. The first group was those who fled the country in the time of President Macías Nguema, whether for political or economic reasons. The second group encompassed everyone stuck abroad at the beginning of the massive repression of the post-independence regime. The third group was the children of all these refugees who were born in exile. They did not experience the physical reality of the Equatorial Guinea drama, but know the facts and are indirect victims. In 1979, some 125,000 Equatoguineans were outside the country, a third of the population of Equatorial Guinea, gathered in eight liberation movements of Equatorial Guinea (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:15). The management of these refugees was subject to controversy between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.

Cameroon and the management of Equatoguinean refugees, 1960–1969

Since it attained independence, Cameroon has faced a rush of Equatoguinean nationals into its territory. The Yaoundé authorities presented in various official documents that they had provided humanitarian assistance which the authorities of Equatorial Guinea instead thought of as the exploitation of their nationals. The management of Equatoguinean refugees in Cameroon from 1960–1979 can be studied in two phases. The first period from 1960 to 1968 corresponds with the management of Spanish-Guinean refugees; that is to say the refugees who fled the Spanish colonial repression. The second phase covers the period of 1968–1979 for refugees from the dictatorship of the first president of Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Macías Nguema.

With the influx of Equatoguinean refugees, Cameroon said it provided administrative, financial and political aid to refugees. According to Cameroon, it addressed humanitarian acts towards Equatoguinean refugees living in its territory such as hosting, maintenance; and the distribution of aid towards nationalist refugees. Cameroon also granted land for agriculture or housing, recruited qualified refugees in the public service and supported the education of their children (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963–1969. Letter No. 565). Among rural refugees, activities had three guidelines: housing and health aid, and assistance to self-reliance activities (Mouelle Kombi 1996:61). Areas in the southern region of Cameroon, specifically the Ntem Department, were reserved for Equatoguineans. These areas were populated by the Fang, who shared kinship with many of the Equatoguinean refugees, and were managed according to the principles of the Geneva Convention on Refugees and the African hospital practice (Ndam Njoya 1976:214).

The Cameroonian government planned the installation and accommodation of refugees on its territory⁹. Due to ethnic affinities, the Minister of Foreign Affairs recommended to the people of the South Province to welcome and host ‘gracefully’ Spanish-Guinean refugees ‘without constituting a separate group’. The Cameroonian government encouraged the indigenous population to grant land to refugees for housing and food crops. In this regard, President Ahidjo recognized that:

... the refugees were received by the people of Cameroon who hosted them. I must say that, as it should, the government has contributed in helping those who hosted them in providing for their sustenance until the issues are cleared up (La Presse du Cameroun, July 22, 1963).

The Cameroonian government gave the opportunity to refugees to practice certain professions in its territory. Two dozen Equatoguinean refugees were recruited into the Cameroonian public service and Cameroon took care of

the education of their children (Koufan 2008). In 1963, the Foreign Affairs Minister for Cameroon asked the Ntem authorities to integrate refugees' children in local schools. Pensions were also allocated to refugees to meet their needs (food, clothing, medical care etc.) (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963–1969. Letter No. 1819). Credit was also made available to divisional authorities to help these refugees and reports sent by the credit management commission to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explain the management of the aid. The Cameroonian government made an exception for Equatoguinean nationalist leaders whose liaison offices functioned in Yaounde, Douala, and Ebolowa. Renewable refugee certificates were issued to enable them to benefit from the multifaceted assistance of Cameroon.

Equatoguinean exile nationalism and anti-colonial politics

The creation of various liberation movements in Spanish Guinea from 1950 had triggered reprisals from the Spanish government and the exile of many independence fighters (Liniger-Goumaz 1982). The the Head of the movement, Acacio Mañe Ela, collaborated with the Cameroonian resistance movement which fought against French colonialism (HCR 2001). Cameroon supported the nationalist movements until their official recognition by the colonial power. It thus encouraged the creation and maintenance in its territory of political activities of nationalist movements of Equatorial Guinea during its decolonization process (creation of parties, political meetings and conventions). At the moment of provincializing¹⁰,

... the Spanish government did not recognize most political movements in Equatorial Guinea to the point that most nationalist parties were created by exiles and had their headquarters abroad (Accra, Brazzaville, Douala, Ambam) (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:257).

In Cameroon, the refugees created IPGE, which was temporarily headquartered in Ambam-Cameroon with Epota Perea as chair and Clemente Ateba as secretary (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:257). Until 1963, IPGE and MONALIGE were linked to nationalist parties of Cameroon. To better focus their efforts and assist them more effectively, in February 1963 the Cameroonian government established a coordination office of Spanish-Guinean movements in Ambam, with Maho Sikacha as president, Perea Epota as vice president, and Ndongo Miyone as Secretary General (Koufan and Tchudjing 2001:225). This office brought together the MONALIGE, the Movimiento Pro-Independencia of Guinea Ecuatorial (MPIGE) and IPGE. In August 1963, the second congress of the IPGE, encouraged by the Cameroonian government, was held in Ambam. Macías Nguema made his first participation in a political party in 1963 when he briefly joined the IPGE, the MUNGE and MONALIGE whose impact grew quickly (Koufan and Tchudjing 2001:225).

In 1967, the Cameroonian government advised MONALIGE, IPGE and MUNGE to create a joint secretariat. This secretariat was a kind of united front to consult and negotiate around a united position against Spain during the first phase of the constitutional conference in Madrid preparing independence (La Presse du Cameroun 1963; ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969). This secretariat was created in October 1967. The Cameroonian authorities also financially encouraged Spanish-Guinean nationalist movements. Cameroon granted financial assistance to Equatoguinean nationalist parties¹¹. These nationalists, united by the coordination office, earned money from Cameroonian public service. In a letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Federal Minister of Territorial Administration, dated 25 April 1963, and responding to the problem of managing the funds allocated to refugees, he recommended:

The meetings are at the disposal of the coordination office, but in conjunction with the Divisional Officer who will authorize the holding and facilitate necessary movements ... As for the Douala refugees who surrendered to the meetings to be held only in the Ntem region, it will be granted travel facilities by the least expensive means possible and accommodation facilities' (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969. Letter No. 565).

Financial assistance to refugees was managed by a committee in which sat two members of the coordination office. The Cameroon public treasury supported hotel and transport costs inside and outside of Cameroon. Cameroon had financed the participation of MONALIGE, MUNGE and IPGE in Madrid for independence constitutional conferences in 1968 and 1969 (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969. Letter No. 565). Regarding the passage of refugees in Yaounde,

... only the President and the Secretary General of the nationalist movement are allowed to come and meet with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on issues concerning refugees. These must request the Divisional Officer of residence's permission to come to Yaounde and get from him transport facilities and some pocket money to enable their subsistence in the capital (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969. Letter No. 565).

The Divisional Officer was required to make reports on the management of resources at their disposal to help the coordination office. The coordination office of Ebolowa and its annex at Ambam had at its disposal meeting rooms, supplies and office equipment offered by the Divisional Officer. This attitude towards the leaders of the Spanish-Guinean nationalist parties Coordination Office led some nationalists to abuse the state's trust. For example, Spanish-Guinean nationalist François Ndong, who had 'self-presented to the Divisional Officer of Kribi as nationalist leader of the Spanish Guinea in Cameroon', did

not hesitate in taking a room at the Barbeza hotel and eating in the restaurant of the hotel (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969).

The post-independence dictatorial regime of Macías Nguéma created another influx of refugees in neighbouring countries including Cameroon. At the independence of Equatorial Guinea, Spain promised to maintain a special relationship by coming to its aid in all areas. Spain recognized the sovereignty of Equatorial Guinea, and assured of its assistance in preserving its independence, and guaranteeing the convertibility of the Equatorial Guinean currency to cover expenses related to the transition period (Liniger-Goumaz 1986). Spain wanted to preserve its influence in the Gulf of Guinea. According to Liniger-Goumaz (1986:84), Spain imagined an Equatorial Guinea organized around Madrid's interests in order to perpetuate the system of autonomy established in 1964. Therefore Spain stationed troops in Equatorial Guinea after independence. Disputes between the two governments led Spain to suspend its aid to Equatorial Guinea. After Equatorial Guinea's independence, Spain did not keep its promises to fund the country's budget. Following a series of anti-Spanish speeches by Macías Nguema a few months after the independence of Equatorial Guinea and the accreditation of the Spanish ambassador, demonstrations took place in Rio Muni in February 1969. In March of the same year, the anti-Spanish protests provoked the departure of nearly 800 Spanish nationals and the closure of large agro-pastoral businesses.

Spain's refusal to fund Equatorial Guinea's budget provoked a series of crises between the two countries; Equatorial Guinea abolished the payment of bonuses for good management to Spanish overseas servants and in turn, Spanish companies refused to finance domestic trade in Malabo. In addition, the case of Spanish flags¹² caused the massive departure of the Spaniards. Furthermore, there was a coup attempt in March 1969 by Miyone Ndongo that was suspected of being supported by Spain (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:14). The diplomatic and political crises in Equatorial Guinea plunged the country into economic crisis. Macías Nguema decreed a state of emergency and created a real machine of repression and propaganda (Koufan & Tchuding 2001:227).

Cameroon and the management of Equatoguinean refugees (1970-1979)

From 1970 to 1979, Cameroon welcomed, housed and assisted, uninterrupted, thousands of anti-Nguémist Equatoguinean refugees arriving in groups. It was assisted in this task by international organizations (UNHCR, WFP, UNDP) and religious institutions (the ecumenical World Council of Churches in Geneva, FEMEC or EEC). The Macías Nguema terror regime was responsible for this situation. According to the Alianza Democrática Nacional de Restauración (ANRD), in 1978 there were 40,000 Equatoguinean refugees in Cameroon

including 24,800 men and 12,200 women with 3,000 children. Among these refugees were 52 political refugees who had already held administrative positions in Equatorial Guinea (Liniger-Goumaz 1986:421; *La Voz del Pueblo* 1979). For example, the first Minister of Health of Equatorial Guinea, Ekong Andeme, went into exile in Cameroon a few years after independence (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:100).

Cameroon cooperated seriously with the international bodies on the management of Equatoguinean refugees. In 1978, a donation from the World Food Programme (WFP) in Cameroon was allowed to distribute flour, cans and milk to 2,011 families, that is about 7,060 refugees¹³. From 1974 to 1978, a US \$60,000 fund from the UNHCR and the Council of Churches was permitted to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees. The Federation of Evangelical Churches of Cameroon had agreed to take into consideration assistance to certain refugees by UNHCR (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:100). From November 1978, material assistance to refugees was better organized with the assistance of UNHCR and UNDP following a general cooperation agreement on the program of assistance to 2,011 needy refugee families, signed between Cameroon and UNHCR respectively, in Yaoundé and Geneva in July 1978.

The Cameroonian government instituted a national coordinating body called the National Committee for the Equatoguinean refugees, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the General Delegation for National Security, the Ministry of Defence, two observers (UNHCR and UNDP) and an advisor (UNHCR)¹⁴. A fund of 35,133,649 FCFA was allocated to the committee; 31,794,253 FCFA by UNHCR and 3,349,386 FCFA UNDP. With 306,467 FCFA in interest, the committee's budget was 35,440,104 FCFA. The body provided multifaceted assistance to the needy including humanitarian, health and integration. The results of the assistance project were mixed. The financial resources made available to the committee for local integration of 2,000 heads of poor families were inadequate. According to the committee, these funds could only cover the needs of 200 to 300 refugees or about one tenth of the total number of families affected by the project¹⁵. The management of Equatoguinean refugees provoked the reaction of Equatorial Guinea.

According to Cameroon, the Equatoguinean refugees received humanitarian assistance offered by the government in collaboration with international organizations. Nearly 216 Equatorial Guinea refugees benefited from accommodation in Akonolinga Mbandjock where they worked for SOSUCAM (a sugar company of Cameroon) and CAMSUCO (Cameroon Sugar Company) from 1974¹⁶. Housing assistance consisted of the allocation of plots of land and the provision of equipment and construction materials.

Such was the case in 1979 when Equatoguinean refugees found refuge in the towns of Ambam, Ma'an and Olamzé in the south of the country (Mouelle Kombi 1996). Skilled refugees were recruited into public service. They received land to build their homes and to carry out agricultural work. These refugees were also receiving, as during the decolonization of their country, survival loans granted by the State of Cameroon. Thus, in 1974, an allowance of 50,000 FCFA was paid to each family as a first installation in Mbandjock and Akonolinga. The children of the refugees were admitted to public schools in the general conditions applied to Cameroonians (Liniger-Goumaz 1986:421).

This management by the Cameroonian government was the subject of criticism. Liniger-Goumaz in his first book on Equatorial Guinea wrote:

Since 1969, Cameroon is home to some 30,000 refugees, Equatoguineans, some 1,000 and 1,200 are forced to compulsory work in the sugar cane plantations in Akonolinga and Mbandjock with poverty wages (Liniger-Goumaz 1979:100).

Because of the precarious living conditions of refugees, the ANRD accused Cameroon in 1979 of exploiting the refugees without assistance. The ANRD information body denounced the harassment and insults against the refugees:

The refugees, once in Cameroonian land would be deported to Mbandjock and Akonolinga to work like slaves under the supervision of vigilant guards of the police forces in the sugar cane plantations. No identification would be issued to refugees exposed to police harassment of all kinds. No help from housing, food, health and education would be made and their death would make great havoc in the ranks (La Voz del Pueblo 1979).

Equatoguinean refugee management in Cameroon had accelerated tensions between Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. The third issue of the official bulletin of Macías Nguema's propaganda, dated 29 December 1975, stated:

It is sad and lamentable that a handful of Guinean servants, and against reactionary-revolutionaries, conditional allies of imperialism, unhappy vagrants and thieves, enemies of public and private property, consumers and funds embezzlers, are considered political refugees [...] Cameroon has become refuge nest for Guinean thieves (Guinea-Ecuatorial: Revolución Al Día, No. 3, 29 December 1975).

Exile Equatoguinean dissidents and Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea tensions

From 1974 to 1979, Bonifacio Nguema and Essono Nchama, Foreign Minister and Vice-President of Equatorial Guinea respectively, travelled to neighbouring countries to seek the expulsion of troublemakers. Neighbouring countries refused to join this anti-humanitarian policy leading the editor of the Nguemist newsletter in 1976 to write the following:

The Guinean revolution condemns and disapproves of (...) this continual interference of Cameroon through its corrupt press, in our internal affairs and warned that already, all provocations from said countries against the peaceful revolution of our country will vigorously refuted and answered (Guinea-Ecuatorial: *Revolución Al Día*, No. 10, August 1976).

The government of Equatorial Guinea was afraid of an armed incursion of its nationals exiled in neighbouring territories to destabilize it. This fear led Macías Nguema to be suspicious of his neighbours that he now considered enemies. The fear was not unfounded. Radical groups in neighbouring countries were preparing armed action. These groups were factions of Movement of Liberty and the Future of Equatorial Guinea (MOLIFUGE), led by Miguel Eson Enamn, the OLGE of Celestino Nvo Okenvé, all former leaders of IPGE¹⁷. Despite efforts made by Cameroon to prevent subversion, Equatoguinean refugees continued conducting armed incursions into their homeland. Thus, between 1975 and 1977, refugees from Cameroon made incursions to Afanggui, Nkumadzap, Wora Ayop and Minkomesseng with arms and ammunition taken¹⁸.

Cameroon on its side feared the influence of communist countries present at Rio Muni and Fernando Po. The unfriendly behaviour and presence of Eastern European and other communist countries in Equatorial Guinea had resulted in the hibernation of cooperation agreements, and lower economic trade exchange with neighbouring countries (Koufan and Tchuding 2001:333). Macías Nguema turned to communist countries mainly because of the mass departure of the Spaniards in March 1969 and the fear of a coup supported by Madrid or exiles in neighbouring countries (Koufan and Tchuding 2001:333). He had adopted a nationalist policy, with much revolutionary and anti-imperialist rhetoric. For this reason, he called his neighbours 'accomplices of Western imperialism' or 'agents of neocolonialism' (Guinea-Ecuatorial 1975). Meanwhile, Cameroon accused Equatorial Guinea of espionage and subject to unhealthy Soviet imperialism.

The political tensions between Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon led to the interruption of cooperation with Equatorial Guinea from 1976 to 1979. There were disruptions of telephone and air links and mining of borders at Akelengué. Bans on fishing in the Ntem and in the sea to stop the exile of Equatoguineans, ransoming of nationals of neighbouring countries and recalling diplomats also occurred (Koufan and Tchudjing 2001:334). Equatorial Guinea accumulated maintenance costs and transmission arrears on INTEL CAM totalling 240,752 983FCFA during its deepening economic crisis. In June 1974, due to insolvency and the ingratitude of Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon closed its borders, refused to give scholarships to Equatoguinean students at

the request of Malabo. From 1975-1979, exports from Cameroon to Equatorial Guinea went from 733 tons down to 53 tons (Koufan 2008).

Conclusion

Between 1960 and 1979, Cameroon contended that it provided administrative assistance, political and financial aid to Equatoguinean refugees in its territory. This aid, however, was interpreted differently by the Equatoguinean leaders, who thought Cameroon was exploiting its nationals as slaves in the sugarcane plantations in Mbanjock. Equatorial Guinea authorities also perceived Cameroon as a rear base for dissidents against the colonial regime and the dictatorial regime of Macías Nguema. However, since the 1979 coup in Equatorial Guinea, relations between the two countries have eased, allowing them to coordinate the repatriation of some refugees to Equatorial Guinea.

Some of the claims of the Equatorial Guinea government certainly have some foundation. Cameroon, at one point, had irredentist ideas towards its neighbour. Some analysts have gone so far as to say that all aid that Cameroon gave Equatorial Guinea during its struggle for independence was in order to take over the neighbouring country's territory. It is difficult, however, to accept the Equatorial Guinea accusations of abuse of refugees in Cameroonian plantations. The source of the information, which was the propaganda newspaper of Equatorial Guinea, cannot be considered credible. The controversy over the management of Equatoguinean refugees in Cameroon created misunderstanding and disagreements between the governments of Ahidjo and Nguema. This disagreement between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea finally attenuated after Obiang Nguema took power in Equatorial Guinea in 1979. Equatorial Guinea joined the Union Douanière et Économique de l'Afrique Centrale (UDEAC) where Cameroon and Gabon were the pillars.

Notes

1. This paper is a reviewed version of a communication presented at a workshop organized on 5 October 2015 by Centre de Recherches Historiques of EHESS, at Collège de France, Paris, France on 'Captives, recruited, migrants: Empires and labor mobilization, 17th century to present days'. I acknowledge the participants for their valuable comments that enabled me to review this paper. Thank you to the anonymous reviewers of *Afrika Zamani* for their comments that helped me to improve the level of analysis in this paper.
2. A professor, he was the first in 1947 to establish clear requirements (the abandonment of the colony by Spaniards, the institution of an African government, the organization of elections to choose leaders of an independent Equatorial Guinea, ...) in view of independence which later led to the constitution of the Cruzada Nacional de Liberación. At the time of autonomy, he became Finance Minister, member of the Assembly of Fernando Po, and representative at the Parliament. In 1968 he ran for election on the MUNGE list (Liniger-Goumaz 2000:417).

3. PUNT, *Estatutos*, Santa Isabel, 1973.
4. PUNT, *Estatutos*, Chapter IV, Santa Isabel, 1973
5. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Numero Extraordinario, 7 May 1971.
6. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 14 July 1972.
7. *Unidad de Guinea Ecuatorial*, 22 November 1974, p.5.
8. Equatorial Guinea had 245,989 inhabitants in the 1960 Census and 375,000 people in 1981 (Cabana 1995:9).
9. According to a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cameroon to the Federal Minister of Territorial Administration, 'only three refugees (were) allowed to remain in Douala to liaise with the island of Fernando Poo and Spain. All other refugees especially those from mainland Guinea, will be based in the Department of the Ntem' (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969). Seven refugees were permitted to reside in the town of Ebolowa. The seven were members of the coordination office of the political movement. In February 1963, Ndongo Miyone and Maho Sikara met with Perea Epota in Ambam, Cameroon and established the Coordinating Bureau of Guinean nationalist Movements. Maho was President, Perea Epota was Vice-President and Ndongo Miyone was Secretary General. One of the members wanted a union with Cameroon, especially IPGE. The rest of the Spanish-Guinean refugees were to remain in the southern villages (ANY, 1AA28 Foreign Affairs 1963-1969).
10. The integration of Equatorial Guinea as a province of Spain in the Gulf of Guinea.
11. Archives of the Cameroonian Ministry of External Relations
12. Having refused to reduce the number of sites where Spain had hoisted its flags, Equatorial Guinea took down the Spanish flags in March 1969.
13. Archives of the Cameroonian Ministry of External Relations.
14. Archives of the Cameroonian Ministry of External Relations.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Archives of the Cameroonian Ministry of External Relations.
18. Ibid.

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