

---

## Oil Conflicts in the Postcolony

Douglas A. Yates

Is oil dependency a cause of war in Africa? Or are both symptoms of something else? Research on the question of the relationship between oil and violence has traditionally been framed in terms of oil as a causal factor. The dominant model has been the limited factor approach, where oil and a small number of other controlling variables are isolated in a large number of cases, then statistically correlated. The alternative approach has been the qualitative case study with its focus on a thick description of context. New thinking has argued for a multi-factor-multi-context approach (Tar 2008). How can context explain conflict? It is the purpose of this chapter to explore one causal context of violence in natural-resource-rich Africa: the postcolonial condition.

As elaborated by Achille Mbembe (2001:102) in his *On the Postcolony*, the notion of 'postcolony' identifies a specifically given historical trajectory: 'that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves'. Mbembe outlines a series of characteristics of the postcolony in Africa, including: the *commandement*, the potentate, the fetish, the aesthetics of vulgarity, and private indirect government. These concepts will be used as a template to explore several mainstream narratives common to the literature on oil-rentier regimes in Africa. The aim is to show that violence in oil-dependent African regimes, like their dependence on oil, may be as much the result of the postcolonial context as it is the effect of oil dependency.

Why focus on oil? 'Of all the resources, none is more likely to provoke conflict between states in the twenty-first century than oil. Petroleum stands out from other materials – water, minerals, timber, and so on – because of its pivotal role in the global economy and its capacity to ignite large-scale combat' (Klare 2001:27). Oil is critical to the global economy because it is the world's major source of primary energy, and because it is extremely lucrative to producer countries. It is also a vital factor in the military strength of nations, in that it supplies most of the

energy used to power tanks, planes, missiles, ships, armoured vehicles, and other instruments of war. Geopolitically it is highly concentrated in a few large reservoirs, and many of those reservoirs are approaching exhaustion. On top of all this, it appears that the world is approaching 'peak oil'. For all of these reasons, the risk of armed conflict over valuable oil supplies is likely to grow in the years to come (Klare 2004).

### Oil and Violence

A growing body of scholarly literature has concerned itself with the measurable association between oil and war in Africa. Contemporary research published by highly regarded scholars and leading international financial institutions like the World Bank have shown that developing economies with high rates of dependence on extraction and export of natural resources have a correspondingly high propensity to violent conflict, be it either full civil war (Collier & Hoeffler 2001; Le Billon 2001; Ross 2004) or just another external intervention by major powers (Klare 2001; Le Billon & Khatib 2004). High dependency on oil *is* correlated with war. However, since most of the wars in the world today are occurring in Africa, should we then say that, statistically, Africa is correlated with war? Before answering 'Of course not!', consider that critics of pioneer correlation studies on resource conflicts have long argued that 'context matters' (Basedau 2005). Pointing to peaceful oil producers like Norway or Brunei, which have high rates of dependence on petroleum but have no correspondingly high propensity to violent conflict, and pointing to war-torn societies like Afghanistan or Somalia, which have a high propensity to conflict but are not dependent on oil, it must be recognized that oil is not, *sine qua non*, the cause of war. What really matters are the historical, geopolitical, and socioeconomic contexts in which oil exporters must survive.

One such contextual cause of resource wars in Africa may be the postcolonial condition. Rather than being the *casus belli*, oil dependency may be – like war – another effect of the 'displacement' and 'entanglement' pervasive in the postcolony (Mbembe 2001:15). Certainly we have reached a stage in the emerging literature where no one claims that oil is, *per se*, a cause of any complex social phenomena like war.

In their sensational grab for publication and attention, many scientific studies on 'oil war' (Klare 2004; Heinberg 2003; Kaldor, Karl & Said 2007) have also failed to differentiate between war and other forms of violence. Quantitative correlations between oil and war (Collier and Hoeffler 2001) did not address the qualitative varieties of oil-related violence. Some oil conflicts were armed struggles about ownership and control over resources that could be called 'resource wars', like the Bakassi Peninsula conflict between Niger and Cameroon. But others were struggles over the distribution of revenues derived from natural resources. These were not resource wars, but 'revenue conflicts'. Some were about the inability of

weak state institutions to cope with looting, misappropriation and exclusion of significant sectors of society leading to violent protests. These were not wars, but domestic 'police matters' of maintaining public order. Others were about states using their resource revenues to build up repressive security machinery and embarking on violent terror against their own people. These were not wars, but one-sided 'violent tyrannies'. Some were illegal uses of resource revenues by disgruntled factions of the governing elite to sponsor anti-government insurgencies or secession movements. These were not wars, but 'factional politics' using violence as leverage. Others were organized predation and extortion of big businesses in the resource extraction sector by aggrieved groups. These were not wars, but 'organized crime'. Some were military interventions by foreign stakeholders to protect their investments. These were not (called) wars, but 'peacekeeping operations' (Omeje 2008:14-15).

The pervasiveness of violence in postcolonial oil regimes in Africa may be a heritage of a colonial rationality used to rule, a very specific state sovereignty Achille Mbembe called '*commandement*,' which rested on three sorts of violence: (1) the founding violence, which played an instituting role for the regime; (2) the violence produced after, that had to do with legitimation; and (3) the violence designed to ensure this authority's maintenance, spread, and permanence. 'Falling well short of what is properly called 'war', it recurred again and again in the most banal and ordinary situations' (Mbembe 2001:25).

### **Soldiers and Oil**

Six out of eight (or 75%) of the rulers in African oil-rentier states are soldiers by profession, and came to power by a *coup d'état* or by winning a violent civil war. This is much higher than the overall average for Africa where twenty-two out of fifty-two rulers (or 42%) came to power by a *coup d'état* (Gaddafi, Nguema, Konate, Compaoré, Déby, Jammeh, Museveni, Sanha, Rajoelina, Bozizé, Aziz, and Al Bashir), through violent civil war (Dos Santos, Mugabe, Afwerki, Sassou-Nguesso, Kagame, Ahmed, and Zenawi), or were installed by the military (Gnassingbe and Kabila) or secret police (Guellah). But it is not unusually high.

Oil was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of military rule in Africa. It was not, strictly speaking, the *cause* of these military dictatorships. There are military rulers in African countries that do not have oil, and there are oil-dependent countries not ruled by the military. And the same country has alternating periods of civilian and military rule.

As one scholar noted over forty years ago, when statistically correlating the structural characteristics of regimes that had suffered military coups, 'it is impossible to specify as a class countries where coups have occurred from others which have so far been spared' (Zolberg 1966:71). This led Decalo to conclude that the search for the structural causes of coups was erroneous. 'The core analytic flaw is the confusion of very real and existing systemic tensions in African states (which

are, however, the universal *backdrop* of all political life on the continent) with other factors – often the *prime* reasons for a military upheaval – lodged in the internal dynamics of the officer corps’ (Decalo 1976:13). Oil-dependency is a contextual factor where military rule is empirically more probable in Africa (75% to 42%), without being a *causa sine qua non*.

**Table 4.1:** Coups d’Etat and Civil Wars in African Oil-Rentier States

	Coups d’Etat	Civil Wars
Angola	-	1975-2002
Cameroon	-	
Chad	1975, 1990	1960-1990
Congo-Brazzaville	1963, 1968, 1977, 1979	1993-1997
Equatorial Guinea	1979	-
Gabon	1964	-
Mauritania	1978, 1980, 1984	-
Nigeria	1966, 1975, 1983, 1985, 1993	1967-1970
São Tomé & Príncipe	1995	-
Sudan	1958, 1964, 1969, 1985, 1989	1956-72, 1982

Soldiers presiding over the African oil exporting countries can be perceived as elaborately armed and violent gas-station attendants for rich oil-consuming world powers. Alternatively, military rule may be viewed as a modern version of the process of state formation in Africa. As early as the seventeenth century, writes Mbembe, a tradition of predatory states living by raiding, capturing and selling captives was reinforced: ‘Against a background of territorial fragmentation and structural stagnation, slaving military regimes, devoid of civil responsibility, had come into being, and provided themselves with means, not necessarily of conquering territory and extending their rule, but of seizing resources in men and goods’ (2001:69). The model of domination – ‘half-suzerain, half-sultanic’ – that resulted from these upheavals produced a general insolvency and material devastation almost everywhere in the region and ‘left a situation in which the state was unable to make necessary decisions on who is to get what’ (2001:75). ‘Soldiers and policemen live off the inhabitants’, writes Mbembe (2001:80): ‘The question is how such a manner of ruling becomes institutionalized and becomes part of that form of government we are describing as indirect private government’.

### Oil and Violence in Nigeria

Oil in Nigeria has been a 'motor for deepening inequalities' (Mbembe 2001:41) and has certainly played a role in the continual violence. The first association between oil and violence in Nigeria was the armed secession of Biafra and the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). Lagos and Enugu (the capital of Biafra) contested the rights to the oil. Some suspected that French strategic support for Biafra was calculated to scramble for the oil. After the victorious federal government suppressed the Igbo rebellion, Lagos embarked on a struggle to 'nationalize' its oil industry. This next struggle to wrest control from foreign corporations was legitimized by a post-war nationality discourse: i.e. a conflict between Nigerian and foreign capitalists.

This second conflict influenced the trend towards greater state involvement and attempts at nationalizing the oil industry. The underlying idea was to dilute foreign control through increased participation by Nigerian capital, and also to nationalize the very identity of oil. Nationalization meant 'Bonny light sweet crude' would thereafter be called 'Nigerian' oil. The creation of a Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) promised that all Nigerians would be entitled to production revenues, to promote *national* unity after the civil war (Ukiwo 2008:78). As the Civil War had demonstrated, Nigeria was a state without a nation. Oil was to serve as its main instrument of nation-building.

Challenges to the concept of 'Nigerian' oil later came from the aggrieved peoples of the oil-rich Niger Delta. Some preferred a designation such as 'Bonny light' that specified the place from which the oil was being exploited. They argued that indigenous people of the oil-producing communities should be given privileged access to the rent derived from their natural resources. They saw the 'nationalization' discourse as a hypocritical disguise for internal colonialism, and developed a critical 'indigenization' discourse that challenged the foundations of Nigerian federalism (Ukiwo 2008; Naanen 1995). Indigenization strategies took many forms. Sometimes the local peoples living around the oil facilities approached the multinationals for community projects. Other times they attempted to stop production by occupying flow stations or blocking roads. Sometimes local elites demanded that jobs be reserved for them. Others agitated for a larger share of the oil revenues. At its most extreme, indigenization called for exclusion of non-indigenous peoples from occupying posts, claiming that local jobs should be reserved exclusively for local people (Ukiwo 2008:82). Perhaps the most famous indigenous-rights activist was Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed by the military regime for speaking this discourse on behalf of Ogoniland. After his execution (with the complicity of Shell) was revealed, he became an international symbol for the rights of all indigenous peoples in Niger Delta.

In 1990 a local Shell employee was informed that there was going to be an Ogoni protest against the abuses of the company, which included several thousand oil spills in the region. Shell called the state police commissioner to warn him about the impending protest, and demanded the police provide protection. The police responded to this request by arriving, armed, and shooting 80 Ogoni villagers dead. This was the opening of the struggle for emancipation of Ogoniland from the foreign oil industry and its domestic collaborators.

Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote a book entitled *On a Darkening Plain* (1989) which described how the oil companies, in particular Shell, had turned the Niger Delta into an 'ecological disaster' and 'inhumanized' its inhabitants. At the point in time, few people in the outside world knew how bad pollution had become in the oil region. The international press paid little attention to the grievances of the Niger Delta people, and was at any rate more concerned with the broader abuses of the military regime. But Saro-Wiwa managed to get international media attention, and as a founding member and president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) published the now famous 'Ogoni Bill of Rights'. In January 1993 he rallied 300,000 people, nearly two-thirds of all the Ogoni population to participate in a manifestation he called 'Ogoni Day'. He gave a speech in which he declared Shell *persona non grata* and urged all the minorities in the Niger Delta to 'rise up now and fight for your rights' (Shaxson 2008:198). The rally was an immense success, on both the spiritual and material front, and resulted in extended protests against the oil company that forced Shell to shut down its operations. This stopped 30,000 barrels of day from flowing to foreign consumers, who now understood there was a problem.

The reaction was predictable, and emblematic of how military regimes and multinational oil companies collaborate in violent repression in Africa. A memo written by the commander of the Internal Security Task Force (a secret police created to suppress dissidents) explained that: 'Shell operations still impossible unless ruthless military operations are carried out' (sic) and recommended 'wasting operations' (Shaxson 2008:198). In May 1994 this task force went on a bloody rampage across Ogoniland, killing four Ogoni chiefs, and at least 50 other civilians. It arrested Saro-Wiwa and fifteen Ogoni activists, and held them without any access to their lawyers, charging *them* with having killed the Ogoni chiefs! Saro-Wiwa was convicted in November 1995, despite pleadings by Nelson Mandela and others, and was publicly hanged, with eight other Ogoni activists, in a warning to anyone who dared to challenge the right of foreigners to exploit and pollute their lands in collaboration with the military regime.

Shell in fact colluded with the military in this mock trial by bribing witnesses to give false testimony against the Ogoni activists. We know this because, fifteen years later, a successful civil action was brought against Shell in a Manhattan court of appeals that charged the company with complicity in the execution of Saro-Wiwa (*Wiwa v Shell*). Wishing to avoid more bad publicity, Shell agreed to pay

\$15 million to Saro-Wiwa's son and other relatives of the executed activists, a portion of which went into a trust for social programs in the region affected by Shell's oil spills and gas flaring (New York Times 2009; BBC 2009). But Shell's settlement did not provide an admission of guilt. It avoided a trial in which its collusion and pollution would have been aired in court for the whole world to see. Besides, \$15 million was like lunch money to a multinational.

The reason this sad story is dragged up here and now is to reflect on the historical sequence unfolding in Africa, 'the direct link that now exists between, on the one hand, deregulation and the primacy of the market and, on the other, the rise of violence and the creation of private military' (Mbembe 2001:79). Shell's violent rule over Ogoniland is an example of what Mbembe (2001:67) has called 'private indirect government'.

### **Oil and Coup d'Etat in Chad**

'The fragmentation of public authority and emergence of multiple forms of private indirect government', writes Mbembe (2001:67), is one of the major developments in postcolonial Africa: 'Through these apparently novel forms of integration into the international system and the concomitant modes of economic exploitation, equally novel technologies of domination are taking shape over almost the entire continent'. Perhaps the best example of postcolonial commandment under international governance was the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project. All the country experts recognized a real possibility of its failure from the very start. The risks were high, because Chad was the prototypical case study of a 'collapsed state'.

Readers should be reminded that in those days Chad was famous as the very first chapter of William Zartman's seminal book, *Collapsed States* (1995), that coined the term. Analysts, scholars, and educated people at the World Bank most certainly knew that Chad had suffered from a large number of revolts, rebellions, assassinations, extra-judicial killings, *coups d'état*, foreign military interventions, regional successions, and a civil war that touched every corner of the country. As William Foltz wrote in the opening chapter, 'No part of the country escaped armed violence; no Chadian family escaped the violence unscathed' (Zartman 1995:15).

Several explanations have been given for state failure and collapse in Chad. First, it has one of the most *ethnically diverse* social mosaics in Africa. While his figures are contested by some scholars as widely exaggerated, Foltz (1995) counted between 72 and 110 different language groups. CIA *World Factbook* estimates over 200 ethnicities. These ethnic groups have fractionalized into highly segmented politico-guerrilla groups where 'bloody fights *between* fractions of the same ethnic group' were more common than conflicts 'in which ethnic groups confronted one another as *blocs*' (Zartman 1995:17).

Playing on this ethnic division, Mohammar Kaddafi of Libya crossed the northern border at the Aouzou Strip and annexed one third of Chad's territory in the chaos. This raises the second major explanation for state collapse. Chad had *no natural borders* and six neighbours (Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and CAR) so it required 'hard' military and 'soft' diplomatic power to keep the lines on the map that colonialism had drawn. Finally, the colonial legacy of France had done little to build state capacity. Chad was 'France's Cinderella colony' (Buijtenhuijs 1989:54), utterly neglected economically and educationally. Chad suffered from a dramatic lack of well-trained civil servants in the beginning of the 1960s, people to man the state apparatus, especially at the regional and local level. After de-colonization France had used Chad as a neo-colonial battlefield in its regional struggle against Libya for mastery of the Sahel, and civil war collapsed the state. All the government buildings in N'djamena were sacked and pillaged. All government functionaries eventually fled the capital city for their lives. The last government salaries were paid in August 1979, and State authority definitively collapsed in 1980.

Reconstruction started in 1982, when Hissein Habré *Forces Armées du Nord* (FAN) took the capital from a weak transitional government, a hydra of ethno-political factions. Foltz (1995) claims that Habré managed to accomplish basic elements of state reconstruction in his eight years of rule, before he was overthrown in a *coup d'état* in November 1990. Nobody has written poetry about the beauty of the Habré regime. But he left behind something to command to his successor.

Idris Déby, that successor, was a professional soldier who came to power by *coup d'état*, and who had the good fortune to be potentate at an historical moment in time when the international community (represented by international financial organizations and the multinational oil corporations) became seriously interested in exploiting Chad's oil. To bring this oil to market, however, it was necessary to build an enormous pipeline from Doba in Southern Chad to Kribi along the coastline of Cameroon. Investors were assured by the participation of the World Bank that they would recover their fixed capital investments. The multinationals were provided with public relations by the World Bank, who touted the project as a model operation of using oil for poverty alleviation.

By the time the Doba-Kribi pipeline was finished in 2003, a series of grievances from local communities affected by the pipeline (and not just those entirely wiped off the map by the football-field-wide corridor cut through the forest) included a significant migration of people from other regions who spontaneously settled in their region. There were complaints about excessive dust caused by the construction, and the contamination of water reservoirs by the underground burial of the pipe. Inflation in the prices of basic commodities and housing also occurred as foreign workers arrived in their villages. Located in the middle of an equatorial rainforest, oil-worker salaries largely exceeded the entire income of

these rural villages. Locals also complained about the long delays in the delivery of promised aid programs to help local entrepreneurs to sub-contract. Finally, and most poignant, were the complaints that the village school teachers were leaving their schools to take well-paid construction jobs on the pipeline. The oil consortium had to manage this public relations catastrophe by agreeing to devote significant resources to social and environmental 'safeguards'.

The first thing that ExxonMobil did to meet environmental concerns about oil spills and the possibility of bunkering by gangs of disgruntled youths (like in the Niger Delta) was to bury the pipeline underground. Next the consortium hired 112 professional staff members to work in its environmental group, who processed 4,120 'compensation' claims from villagers who lived along the corridor. The consortium also paid 226 villages an additional 'regional' compensation payment for overall 'externalities'. Furthermore, the consortium re-routed the pipeline from its initial path in such a way as to avoid 'environmentally sensitive' areas and to protect 'indigenous communities'. One group that received special attention from this effort was the Pygmies. The government of Cameroon even created two national parks in compensation for the environmental damage caused by the pipeline's construction (Gary & Karl 2003:65).

The Déby regime, however, had a less rosy plan for Doba than a game park for tourists. The World Bank management argued that administrative capacity could be built in Chad at the same time as the pipeline, rather than preceding the start of construction. But its own International Advisory Group doubted the ability to develop both at the same pace, and called it a two-speed problem: 'The commercial project is moving forward, while the institutions are limping along' (Gary & Karl 2003:65). In its project appraisal document on the pipeline, the World Bank claimed, contrary to the evidence, 'Chad has successfully put in place democratic political institutions' but Chad's republican institutions were flagrantly violated during presidential (2001, 2006) and legislative (2002, 2006) elections which even the US State Department has reported to be 'fraudulent,' with 'widespread vote rigging' and 'local irregularities', that permitted President Déby to later amend the Constitution so as to remove the term limits on his office, and to hold an unbeatable majority of seats in the National Assembly. Only a completely blind eye to this spectacle of electoral authoritarianism allowed the World Bank to give its approval that Chad was improving its democratic 'voice and accountability.'

The cause of oil corruption is no great mystery, but a collection of institutional incentives and inducements, where government agents are not held accountable for their acts, they have wide discretionary power, and they have exclusive power over the oil sector. This opportunity to be corrupt is institutional; but the choice to be corrupt is human. The first evidence of oil corruption in Chad came in late 2000, three years before the first drop of oil was exported, when the government announced that it had spent the first \$4.5 million of a \$25 million signature bonus

on military weapons. The revenue management law did not technically cover such signatory bonuses, which were paid by the oil consortium whenever a government signed a contract. But clearly this was a violation of everything the World Bank had promised. Chad had known 30 years of bloody civil war. Its government at that time was fighting rebellions against rebel Zaghawa clansmen in the East (enraged that President Déby was not doing enough to protect his ethnic kinsmen from massacres in Darfur). Furthermore, a potential conflict was brewing with Sudan itself. As Doba reached peak oil production, Déby found himself in need of more weapons to fight off no less than three separate coup attempts coming from the East (2007, 2008, and 2009). Surely good governance does not mean that international financial institutions perform all of the good governance, and domestic government performs all of the bad. 'If the history of development assistance teaches us anything,' admitted the World Bank in 1999, 'it is that external support can achieve little where the domestic will to reform is lacking'. Déby paid back his loan to the World Bank, and suspended its participation in EITI in 2009.

### **Oil and Armed Resistance**

Can Africans living in an oil-rich region emancipate themselves from 'violent tyranny' by means of armed resistance when that regime is supported financially, diplomatically, and militarily by foreign powers? When foreign powers crave their oil, when international governance initiatives prove insufficient, when their states are unwilling or incapable of changing themselves, when opposition parties lack democratic elections, when the press is not free, then can armed struggles succeed in fighting their 'paradox of plenty' from below?

Table 4.2 shows that most armed struggles for independence of oil-rich regions of Africa have failed to achieve their goals of self-determination. After four decades of low-intensity conflict by the FLEC in the Cabinda Enclave (formerly known as 'Portuguese Congo') the native Kongo people failed to emancipate themselves from the military regime in Angola. Similarly, the UPC guerrillas who fought for the peoples of the Western Region (formerly 'British Cameroons') were defeated militarily by the French-backed central government. The indigenous Bubi people of Bioko island (formerly 'Fernando Poo') struggled for independence from Equatorial Guinea and were massacred by the Fang regime, and today over two-thirds of them live in exile, where they run their underground movement. In the Nigerian civil war the federal government crushed the rebellious Igbo people who declared their independence as the Republic of Biafra (formerly 'Oil River States'). While these regions are oil-rich, it would be unfair to say that their armed struggles were motivated simply by greed for oil. These were genuine liberation struggles.

**Table 4.2:** Selected Armed Struggles for Self-Determination in Oil-Rich Regions of African States

Angola	Cabinda Enclave Liberation Front (FLEC)	1963-2006	Failed to achieve independence of Cabinda Enclave
Cameroon	Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC)	1948-1971	Failed to achieve autonomy of the Western Province
Equatorial Guinea	Movement for the Self-Determination of Bioko Island (MAIB)	1994-present	Failed to achieve independence of Bioko Island
Nigeria	Republic of Biafra	1967-1970	Failed to achieve independence of Eastern Region
Sudan	Sudan People's Liberation Movement & Army (SPLM/A)	1983-2005	Achieved legal autonomy of Southern Sudan

They were different from other African struggles whose goal was not regional secession, but overthrowing a regime in power. The numerous civil wars in Chad were never about achieving regional independence from Ndjamea, but about overthrowing its corrupt rulers. The same is true for the rebel movements in Angola and Congo. Neither Angola's UNITA nor Congo's 'Ninjas' were about regional secession but rather national unity under a new regime. What is interesting is that the only successful armed struggle for regional self-determination in oil-producing Africa – the SPLM/A of Southern Sudan – came after it changed its strategy from *regional* secession to *national* liberation. Instead of fighting exclusively for the liberation of Southern Sudan, the rebels changed their goal to the liberation of all the people of Sudan. There is a lesson in their victory for other similarly situated armed struggles in oil-rich regions of Africa and the rest of the world.

The second phase of the Sudanese civil war (post-1985) was more than a continuation of hostilities. It was a different kind of liberation struggle. For if the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM) had been fighting a regional war exclusively for independence of Southern Sudan, the new Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its Army (SPLA) instead chose to fight for the liberation of all the Sudanese peoples from the regime in Khartoum. This change of strategy was accomplished by a heroic Dinka leader, John Garang de Mabior (1945-2005), whose really big idea was that the South should stop thinking of itself as a victim trying to flee from the hands of a violent Northern state and start believing in its own abilities to change the destiny of their country. In 1985 he

outlined his vision of what he called the 'New Sudan': (1) the establishment of democracy, social justice, and human rights, (2) secular nationalism, (3) regional autonomy and/or federalism, (3) radical restructuring of power, (4) balanced regional development, and (5) the elimination of institutional racism (Khalid 1987).

None of these goals were based on a singular Southern identity. Rather than conducting another ethno-regional struggle seeking only to preserve historical traditions from the past, Garang based his struggle on ideological objectives that offered a vision of a better future. He defined the aims of the struggle in terms of democracy and human rights instead of rejecting them as being 'Western' and not appropriate for 'Africa.' He defined the aims of the struggle as redressing regional inequalities in the East, the West, and the far North that ended the false amalgam of all non-Southerners as 'Northern'. He defined the enemy not as Northerners, but as particular 'family dynasties' and 'political parties' who had monopolized power to the detriment of all Sudanese people (even those in the Centre). By redefining the goals of the struggle for liberation, his vision of a 'New Sudan' allowed the SPLM/A to build multiregional alliances against a common enemy: i.e. a singular Arabic-Islamic nationalism that had divided the Sudan and caused three decades of civil war.

The internal divisions in the ruling junta in Khartoum allowed the Southerners to gain the upper hand, and by 1999-2000 the SPLA forces had regained much of its lost territory. Khartoum found itself fighting a war against all of the peripheral regions at once, in a million-square-mile territory that it barely controlled. One of those regions – Darfur – became a symbol of the depravity of the second phase of the civil war. The tragic events that brought Darfur to the forefront of international attention, the barbarities committed by the government-backed *Janjaweed* militia, culminated in the most appalling humanitarian disaster, resulting in the displacement of over twomillion people, in addition to 200,000-300,000 who fled to neighbouring Chad and CAR. It is estimated that more than 300,000 people have been killed in Darfur since the outbreak of ethnic hostilities in 2003 (Press TV 2013).

The power of Garang's vision is that, for the first time, people in the peripheral regions could seek to build alliances not only with one another, but with Sudanese from the supposedly privileged core. It transformed the struggle from a regional conflict between the core and the periphery to a national struggle for liberation from a ruling oligarchy led by three tribes. You may be asking, where is the *oil* in all this conflict? The Sudanese Civil Wars were not resource wars, nor should we think about the other numerous armed rebellions as primarily being motivated by greed. The reality is that civil war came first, and then the oil came after. The cause of national liberation movements in African oil-dependent countries is contextual: i.e. their postcolonial condition. Oil has simply fuelled the flames.

### **Oil and Civil War in Congo Brazzaville**

Congo-Brazzaville is more reminiscent of the postcolony described by Mbembe in Cameroon, although the violence has been more pronounced. For the former French Congo has suffered numerous coup d'états, long periods of military rule, and a violent civil war. At the end of the Cold War, two southern civilian politicians, Bernard Kolélas and Pascal Lissouba, rose to prominence in the legislative and presidential elections of 1992. But the ethno-regional character of those elections invalidated their legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Kolélas won the Pool region and those parts of Brazzaville where the Lari and his Bakongo peoples predominated. Pascal Lissouba, a Njabi, won the southern vote in Niari, Bouenza, and Lékouma.

The former military dictator, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, who had reluctantly handed over power in a bloodless national conference, won the northern regions of Cuvette, Sangha, Likoula and Plateaux. Since the northern regions were the least populated, Sassou-Nguesso was eliminated in the first round, leaving Kolélas and Lissouba to fight it out in the second round. Lissouba won, and in 1992 became the first democratically elected president of Congo since Youlou. But divisions between Lissouba and Kolélas quickly turned into a vote of no confidence that required new legislative elections to be held in 1993. Accusations of vote rigging led Kolélas to withdraw from the second round, and both sides began acquiring arms. There were a number of deaths in this period as the capital became the scene of numerous skirmishes among the Congolese militia and a variety of armed political forces representing Lissouba, Kolélas, and Sassou-Nguesso.

The military did not stage a coup d'état. Sassou-Nguesso left Oyo for a mansion outside Paris, beginning a three-year period of self-imposed exile (1994-7), where he offered his services to French businessmen, and enjoyed a lavish lifestyle that was difficult to explain for a former Marxist-Leninist dictator.

Although it is common to date the civil war to 1997, two Swedish scholars doing research in Brazzaville reported widespread ethnic violence by 1994: 'The victims were burned, buried alive, shot, thrown into the river, decapitated and/or slashed with machetes. Among the victims were men, women and children ... Women and very young girls, sometimes mothers and daughters, were gang raped' (Clark 1997:74).

The illegal fortune accumulated by Sassou-Nguesso over his three decades of despotism has led to scandalous revelations in France, including a highly celebrated court case launched by Transparency International revealing the Congolese dictator possessed several multimillion dollar properties in France and had amassed an estimated \$700 million in offshore bank accounts (CCFD 2007:16). Sassou-Nguesso's million-dollar spending sprees in Paris and New York, where he would run up hotel bills of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and purchase diamonds

for his girlfriends and wives, were a form of conspicuous consumption that, in the context, resemble a form of violence. His lavish lifestyle contrasts starkly with the severe poverty of his people, but as Mbembe (2001:109) writes, ‘the *commandement* must be extravagant ... it must furnish public proof of its prestige and glory by sumptuous (yet burdensome) presentation of its symbols of status, displaying the heights of luxury in dress and lifestyle, turning prodigal acts of generosity into grand theatre’. A civilianized Sassou-Nguesso was by then wearing elegant suits (tailored in Paris) and presenting himself again as candidate in the 1999 presidential elections. After three years of intrigue and delay, Lissouba and Kolélas boycotted these elections when they were finally held in 2002. Sassou-Nguesso took 90 per cent of the vote, a notable improvement on his 17 per cent in 1992. Southern-based rebels, realizing they had no foreign allies to help them, finally agreed to a peace accord in 2003. However, Kolelas’ ‘Ninjas’ remain active, and continue to camp in the jungle on the outskirts of Brazzaville, where they live on banditry and smuggling to make ends meet.

### Oil and Tyranny

‘The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion’, writes Mbembe (2001:102): ‘But the postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence’. In the postcolony the *commandement* seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony, in the form of a fetish.

In case you never heard of him, Francisco Macias Nguema was a paranoid schizophrenic sociopath who declared himself president for life. The cinematic depravity of his regime was legendary. In 1975 for example he celebrated Christmas Day by lining up 150 of his political opponents in a soccer stadium and shooting them dead while a macabre brass band played ‘Those Were the Days My Friend’ (Shaxson 2008:34). ‘On another occasion, thirty-five prisoners were told to dig a ditch and stand in it. The trench was then filled so that only the men’s heads stood out of the ground. Within twenty-four hours, ants had slowly eaten the prisoners’ heads, and only two men remained alive’ (Ghazvinian 2007:171-172). Most of the tiny educated class was killed, approximately one-third of the population fled the country, and the formal education system ceased to function.

As a result of the madness of Macias Nguema’s regime, GDP per capita fell from \$260 in 1970 to around \$170 in 1979. Devastation of the economy in the 1970s was accompanied by complete disarray of public finances. ‘Public financial transactions were recorded only sporadically, and the accounts of the Treasury, the Bank of Equatorial Guinea – the former Central Bank – and public enterprises were not kept separately’ (Same 2008:5). Macias Nguema was finally overthrown in a 1979 *coup d’état* led by his nephew Teodoro Obiang Nguema, the military

governor of the island and director of its infamous Playa Negra prison. It is said that Macias Nguema fled into the forest with a suitcase full of cash containing the entire national treasury. Surrounded in a cabin hideaway and unable to escape, he reportedly burned this money in a final act of mad vengeance (Klitgaard 1990), before being captured, tried, and executed by his nephew.

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 Macias Nguema's reign of terror, Obiang had been the head of state security under the old regime, and continued its bloody policies once he took power himself (Liniger-Goumaz 1997, 2000 & 2005). What makes this hard to accept, especially for those who focus narrowly on the macroeconomic figures, is that the country has enjoyed one of the highest rates of economic growth on the continent. Ever since oil started flowing, this tiny country of around one and a half million inhabitants has been reporting rising per capita income figures. Those who are able to read between the lines of such fictional averages (which ignore the unequal distribution of oil wealth) are nevertheless likely to have read glowing reports about the regime in glossy special issues of *Jeune Afrique*, orchestrated by public relations firms and paid for by oil revenues. But a glance at human rights reports will quickly reveal that the arrival of big oil has enriched its kleptocratic rulers, funded the oppression of a miserably impoverished people, and maintained a brutal police state behind a façade of slick public relations paid for by oil.

Although the oil and gas reserves are located offshore around the archipelago, the Bubi and other island peoples have had their resources brutally expropriated by the mainland Fang. The Bubi, it should be said, have demanded an autonomous status since before independence, first refused by Madrid, then later by the Nguemists. When they formed a political party *Movimiento para la Autonomía de la Isla de Bioko (MAIB)* in 1993 the regime refused to recognize it. When they tried to assault military bases in 1998, the Fang junta arrested 550 Bubi activists, and massacred 150 innocent civilians in their villages. Soldiers patrolled the streets of Malabo, indiscriminately beating and raping their women. 'Some of the women had forks thrust in their vaginas and were told, 'From now on, that's your husband' (Global Witness 2004:66). After the initial deaths of numerous Bubi prisoners, without autopsy or investigation, 110 remained incarcerated at the infamous *Playa Negra* prison, where, according to one human rights report, 'a large number were submitted to interminable tortures, attested by the wounds all over their bodies, arms and legs' (Liniger-Goumaz 2003:179). According to the 1999 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report, 'Police urinated on prisoners, kicked them in the ribs, sliced their ears with knives, and smeared oil over their naked bodies in order to attract stinging ants', all of this directed personally by Obiang's brother Armengol, 'who taunted prisoners by describing the suffering that they were about to endure' (Amnesty International 1999).

In describing the regime as a postcolony, we are making reference to a previous colonial regime that served, in a sense, as a model. In the case of Equatorial Guinea, the colonial model was the Spanish fascist regime, in which the Mongomo clan was assimilated and educated. 'The lack of justice of the means, and the lack of legitimacy of the ends, conspired to allow an arbitrariness and intrinsic unconditionality that may be said to have been the distinctive feature of colonial sovereignty. Postcolonial state forms have inherited this unconditionality and the regime of impunity that was its corollary' (Mbembe 2001:26).

To summarize, there is an empirical relationship between resource (specifically oil) conflicts and the crisis of postcoloniality. First, the pervasiveness of violence in postcolonial oil regimes may be attributed, in part, to the unusually high incidence of military rule and police states. Second, the very high levels of economic inequality, intensified by sudden concentrated oil fortunes in the estates of ruling clans, aggravates the already fragile states. Third, the failure of nation-building reduces nationalization policies to predatory internal colonialism by ethnic-oriented patrimonial rulers. Fourth, the emergence of international governance initiatives has provided public relations cover for these postcolonial tyrannies. Fifth, their record high levels of corruption prevent meaningful development from changing the poverty that feeds local grievances against the central government. Sixth, the efforts at armed resistance have in almost all cases failed to overthrow these paradoxically 'successful failed states' (Soares de Oliveira 2007). Seventh, the male domination inherent in postcolonial rule reduces public expenditure to conspicuous consumption by the kleptocratic ruler in order to achieve his phallic spectacle. Eighth, the cinematic depravity of human rights abuses in these regimes appears to be premised on the need to institutionalize violence in the form of a fetish, making all but the most marginal evolutions inhumane government impossible. In the end, the madness of the Macias regime is probably emblematic of the postcolonial context, and its decay into the tyranny of Obiang perhaps symptomatic of the oil curse.

## References

- Amnesty International, 1999, *Equatorial Guinea: A Country Subjected to Terror and Harassment*, 1 January. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR24/001/1999/en>, website accessed on 1/09/13.
- Basedau, M., 2005, 'Resource Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa Beyond the Resource Curse', in M. Basedau and A. Mehler (eds.), *Resource Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Hamburg: Institute for African Affairs, pp. 325-349.
- BBC, 2009, 'Shell Settles Nigeria Deaths Case', BBC London, 9 June.
- Buijtenhuijs, R., 1989, 'Chad: The Narrow Escape of an African State, 1965-1987', in D.B. Cruise O'Brien, J. Dunn, and R. Rathbone, *Contemporary West African States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 49-58.

- Clark, J., 1997, 'Congo: Transition and the Struggle to Consolidate', in J. Clark and D. Gardinier (eds.), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*, Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 62-85.
- Collier, P. and A., Hoeffler, 2001, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et Pour le Développement (CCFD), 2007, 'Biens mal acquis ... profitent trop souvent : La fortune des dictateurs et les complaisances occidentales' [www.ccfid.asso.fr](http://www.ccfid.asso.fr), website accessed on 1/12/10.
- Decalo, S., 1976, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Studies in Military Style*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Foltz, W., 1995, *Reconstructing the Chadian State in Collapsed States*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Press.
- Gary, I. and T.L., Karl, 2003, *Bottom of the Barrel: Africa's Oil Boom and the Poor*, Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services.
- Ghazvinian, J., 2007, *Untapped: The Scramble for Africa's Oil*, Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Global Witness, 2004, *Time for Transparency: Coming Clean on Oil, Mining and Gas Revenues*, Global Witness.
- Heinberg, R., 2003, *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies*, Gabriola, British Columbia: New Society.
- Kaldor, M., T.L., Karl and Y. Said, 2007, *Oil Wars*, London: Pluto.
- Khalid, M. (ed.), 1987, *John Garang Speaks*, London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Park.
- Klare, M., 2001, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Klare, M., 2004, *Blood and Oil: The Dangers and Consequences of America's Growing Petroleum Dependency*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Klitgaard, R.E., 1990, *Tropical Gangsters: One Man's Experience With Development And Decadence in Deepest Africa*, New York: Basic Books.
- Le Billon, P., 2001, 'The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflict', *Political Geography* 20/5, pp.561-584.
- Le Billon, P., and F.E., Khatib, 2004, 'From Free Oil to Freedom Oil: Terrorism, War and U.S. Geopolitics in the Persian Gulf', *Geopolitics*, 9/1, pp.109-137.
- Liniger-Goumaz, M., 1997, *United States, France and Equatorial Guinea: The Dubious Friendship*, Geneva: Les Editions du Temps.
- Liniger-Goumaz, M., 2000, *Historical Dictionary of Equatorial Guinea, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Saro-Wiwa, K., 1989, *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War*. Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishing.
- Liniger-Goumaz, M., 2003, *Colonization – Néocolonialization – Démocratisation – Corruption: L'Anne de la Guinée Equatoriale*, Geneva : Editions du Temps.
- Liniger-Goumaz, M., 2005, *La Guinée Equatoriale Convoitée et Opprimée: Aide-mémoire d'une démocratie 1968-2005*, Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Mbembe, A., 2001, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Naanen, B., 1995, 'Oil-producing Minorities and Restructuring of Nigerian Federalism: The Case of the Ogoni Peoples', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 33/1, pp. 47-48.

- New York Times*, 2009, 'Shell to Pay \$15.5 Million to Settle Nigeria Case', 8 June.
- Omeje, K. (ed.), 2008, *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Press TV, 2013, 'Tribal Clashes in Sudan's Darfur Leave 94 Dead', Press TV, 23 July. <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/07/27/315926/94-killed-in-darfur-clashes/>, website accessed on 1/09/13.
- Ross, M., 2004, 'How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases', *International Organization*, 58/1, pp. 35-67.
- Same, A.T., 2008, *Mineral-Rich Countries and Dutch Disease: Understanding the Macroeconomic Implications of Windfalls and the Development Prospects: The Case of Equatorial Guinea*, Policy Research Working Paper 4595, Washington DC: World Bank.
- Shaxson, N., 2008, *Poisoned Wells: The Dirty Politics of African Oil*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Soares de Oliveira, R., 2007, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, London: Hurst.
- Tar, U., 2008, 'Rentier Politics, Extractive Economies and Conflict in the Global South: Emerging Ramifications and Theoretical Exploration', in K. Omeje (ed.), 2008, *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 27-50.
- Ukiwo, U., 2008, 'Nationalization versus Indigenization of the Rentier Space: Oil and Conflicts in Nigeria', in K. Omeje, ed., 2008, *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South: Multi-Regional Perspectives on Rentier Politics*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 75-92.
- Zartman, I.W., 1995, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Zolberg, A., 1966, *Creating Political Order: The Party States of West Africa*, Chicago: Rand McNally.