



# INVISIBLE DOG

*INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM*

ISSUE # 23 NOVEMBER 2013

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## LIBYA AFTER KHADAFI

There are over 250 different militias roaming in Libya today. They don't follow orders, especially those coming from central authorities. They are an aggregation based on clan or tribes, political or religious beliefs, extremism and terrorism or, in some cases, on a common criminal past or on family relations. Few, definitely a minority, are those militias pleading allegiance to the central government. They survive on the money flowing from the State, whose hope is - at least on a temporary basis - to rein in their excesses and, in a yet undetermined future, to disarm them.

But Libyan factions also have other sources of economic income: exaction, extortion, and kidnappings. They apply their rule of law, that hardly ever coincides with State justice. Revenges, rivalries, arbitrary arrests and family feuds often end up in a bloodshed. Murders have become the daily bread in a country going adrift. Several issues still have to be settled in a civil war among the cruelest in the region. And the elimination of members of the security forces has become systematic in Cyrenaica.

### Stateless

The State - if one can call it as such that resemblance of central authority trying to rule over Libya today - does not have the military or persuasive strength to dissolve the militias. It had tried to absorb them within a legal security framework, but without success. Militias draw their legitimacy from their fight against Muammar Khadafi's loyalists. But those who actually fought were joined by all those criminals who fled or were freed from jail during the civil war. The majority of them is still at large. They have created mobs that are looking for legitimacy by self-defining themselves as militias.

The Libyan police is incapable of contrasting them. They don't have the strength to do it, nor do they know whose orders to follow. Impunity reigns sovereign. In April 2013, alcohol containing methanol was sold on the market and killed over 100 people with its poison. The attempts by police to arrest those involved lead to an armed clash that was won by the criminals. A government envoy was sent to negotiate a cease-fire. And, of course, since then none of the culprits had been put under arrest.

There is also competition between militias over the control of the territory. And disputes are solved manu militari. This is a recurrent phenomena especially in big cities like Tripoli, Misrata, Benghazi or Zintan. We should all bear in mind what happened in June 2012 in

the militia war over the control of the Tripoli international airport. Or the temporary closure of the airstrips in Mitiga in January 2013.

The balance of power between the Kabyles is also in tatters. This was one of the pillars that allowed Muammar Khadafi to reign, it went beyond the centuries-old rivalry between Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania. This was one of the basis of social cohesion and of the cohabitation keeping Libyans together. A society that is largely archaic, conservative, hierarchical and that relies on tribal laws and behaviors. The civil war has tainted the relationship between the Kabyles with deaths and revenges that continue until today in the fight between clan militias.

There are different estimates on the number of members in the ranks of armed Libyan militias. Authorities in Tripoli speak of 40 thousand men. Other figures point to over twice as much. Still way too many. Being a militiaman has now become a respectable job that ensures a decent salary. They seize other people's houses, obey to their boss and take care of their own interests. Militias also manage their own detention centers, as recently discovered by the government and as denounced by humanitarian organizations.

### **A leeway to terrorism**

A weak State incapable of ruling and commanding leaves a large leeway to terrorism. The killing of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens on September 11 2012 in Benghazi is there to prove it. Criminality and terrorism are confused and intersect. The arrest on October 5 2013 in the outskirts of Tripoli of Nazih Abdul Hamed Nabih al Ruqai, also known with his nom de guerre Abu Anas al Libi, confirms, if need be, that Libya has become a host country and a target for Al Qaeda. Al Libi is one of the top terrorists, he had been on wanted list for 15 years and had a 15 million dollars bounty on his head. He had been residing in Libya for over a year, back at home in a place he felt secure after his peregrinations in Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Salafist brigades have taken over Cyrenaica, including the Ansar al Sharia militia responsible for the assassination of the U.S. diplomat. They include around 200 well armed men that Libyan security forces have been unable to face. Another extremist group, the "Vanguard of the Caliphate", claimed the responsibility over the killing of a Sufi cleric, Sheikh Mustafa Rajab al Mahjoubi, in Derna in September 2013. A homicide in the struggle between Salafist extremists and moderate Sufis.

After years in prison, Abdul Hakim Belhaj, former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and involved in acts of terrorism, has now become one of the most influential actors in post-civil war Libya. Belhaj has founded his own party, the Nation Party, and benefits from a certain prestige regardless of the recent accusations involving him in the killing, in March 2013, of a Tunisian leftist politician, Chokri Belaid. He refutes the allegations.

Several militias have declared their affiliation with Al Qaeda. And Libya has now become a breeding ground for terrorists, that are trained and then sent to other conflict zones in the Middle East. The risks of a contagion in the countries neighboring Libya, also facing internal unrest and instability, is extremely high. Tunisia often closes its main border point

with Libya at Ras Jader, fearing both arms trafficking and terrorist infiltrations. For the same reasons, Algeria and Egypt have both reinforced their border patrols.

The south of Libya has been declared off-limits by authorities - the official terms is "closed military zone" - because it is outside the government's control. This is the reign of ravager bands and has become the ideal space to cultivate independence claims by local Berber populations. The area is rife with arms, drugs and migrants' trafficking. In practice, the Libyan borders with Sudan, Chad and Niger are all closed. While Kufra is often the theatre of clashes between Zuwiya and Tebou tribes.

### **The oil factor**

A country that produced and exported a good portion of about 1.5 million oil barrels per day (worth 50 billion dollars of revenues in 2012 alone) is now reduced to extracting 150 thousand barrels, only half of which go abroad. The reason behind this fall? Militias control oil terminals and production sites and demand a greater share of the profits. This initial request was gradually diluted and replaced by "political" claims, like an investigation into oil revenues expenditure in an alleged fight against corruption, and on the the need to divert part of that income to federal authorities. It is not by accident that federalist and independence claims are on the rise in Libya today. Cyrenaica, for instance, produces 80% of all Libyan oil and demands a greater cut. This is the prodrome of a State falling apart. A film we've already watched in Somalia.

The Libyan State, or what is left of it, pays the militias to enforce security at oil producing sites, but they want more. Tripoli is incapable of kicking them out (and it would have to be verified that they have the force to do it), also in the fear that a military confrontation could lead to damages to these vital infrastructures. We are currently in the paradox that the Libyan government has warned all oil tankers from reaching the terminals controlled by militiamen or they shall be attacked. This is the way militias are trying to compensate their loss of government salary.

But Libya - we should keep that well in mind - has been funding and still funds its operations with the revenues from energy products. If these go missing, all those salaries and social services provided by the government are at stake and the State simply risks going bankrupt. Furthermore, part of these revenues are used to import refined oil products (petrol and gasoline) that fuel the domestic market. Libya is in the same situation Iraq still is. A major oil producer where petrol is mainly sold on the black market. And all of this is happening in Libya today.

### **The wrong direction**

Corruption has now become endemic. Even Muammar khadafi had been incapable of ridding his country of it. But he had used it as a tool during his rule. Corruption has become so widespread in Libya that it has become the main source of income for many families. Tripoli already tops the most corrupt countries in the world index.

For this reason, a law approved by the Libyan General National Congress - the Parliament - in July 2012, dubbed "law of political exclusion", sets the non-eligibility to public posts for

all the members of the past regime. An initiative strongly against any attempt of national reconciliation and that has exacerbated social tensions. One of the major flaws of the law is that it has not contemplated all those Libyans that switched to the rebels during the civil war. But probably the main aim of this bill was to get rid of politicians like Ali Zeidan (former Ambassador under Khadafi and current Prime Minister), Mohammed Megaryef (former Ambassador too and Speaker of Parliament when the law was passed) and of about 30 other members of parliament. Suffice it to remind that some congressmen were kidnapped during the Parliamentary process to approve the bill. And it is not a coincidence that Megaryef has survived a couple of attacks since the law was promulgated.

In the mean time, the Supreme Court in Tripoli, namely its Constitutional Section, has recently re-introduced polygamy. Even what little Khadafi had done in 40 years of rule to elevate the social status of Libyan women has been lost. The same goes for electricity, and mainly in the capital, that is now rationed. At night it is better off to stay at home. The risk of moving around after sunset is too high.

This is why the Italian embassy has confined all of its personnel working in its diplomatic representation to a hotel - the Watan - across the street from its premises. Italians, to go to work and back home, travel a mere three or four meters on public soil. Security measures have been reinforced following the attack on the Consulate in Benghazi on January 12 2013. Tripoli is now at the mercy of militias. In August 2012 three car-bombs exploded in the Libyan capital followed by clashes between clan militias in several neighborhoods in Tripoli. Some of them, like Souk al Juma, are still off-limits.

In this context of total dissolution, on October 10 2012 Prime Minister Ali Zeidan was kidnapped for a few hours outside the hotel he lives in - the Corinthia - in downtown Tripoli. The abduction was carried out with impunity, without any reaction from the body guards and as if it had become normal to kidnap a government official in plain day.

Some sources initially hypothesized that this was an arrest following a warrant issued by a judge. Others claimed this could have been a reprisal attack by Islamist militias following Abu Anas al Libi's arrest by the United States. The U.S. had the nice idea of going public about the Prime Minister's support to their extraordinary rendition. This is why the abduction was also considered an attempt to push Ali Zeidan to resign. In this case, evidence could point to Berber leader Nouri Abusahmasin, with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. He is the President of the National Council and the institutional deputy of Zeidan, who is a secular and liberal leader, is case of his resignation.

For whatever reason, the Libyan politician was released after a few hours. A sudden remorse had struck the abductors? Not at all. But the menace of an armed intervention to free the Prime Minister by the Misrata and Zintan militias was a factor to be accounted for. In case of a clash, the Tripoli militia (self-defined "Chamber of the Libyan revolutionaries") would have surely been annihilated. Even the detention and trial of members of the past regime is controversial. Zintan still refuses to hand over Khadafi's son, Seif al Islam, to a

tribunal in Tripoli. And always in Zintan, there are ongoing clashes targeting the Mashasha ethnic group, originally from Niger.

The Balkanization of Libya is a hard fact. Since March 17 2011, when the revolution started, and following October 20 2011, when khadafi was eliminated, Libya has gone a long way, but in the wrong direction. A bloodthirsty dictator, that had granted order across the country, was replaced by social chaos. Libya is today a nation going adrift where rule of law has dissolved.

Those who fought in rebel ranks in the utopian pursuit of a nascent Arab Spring are now faced with a disintegrating State, a never born or desired democracy, a rising terrorism and an increasingly widespread islamic fundamentalism. If one were to draw a balance, the result would be and is disastrous.

It is possibly following their experience with Libya that the United States opted against an intervention in Syrian affairs. History teaches, for those who know how to read it or interpret it, that each time a country exits a totalitarian regime, and has a population that has not acquired sufficient sensibility towards the concepts of democracy and peaceful cohabitation, the end result is always social anarchy. Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Tunisia are a direct witness of this deduction.

## **THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ITALIAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES**

Following the revelations on the so-called Datagate scandal, an unsparing comment by the British Secret Services on their Italian counterparts made the headlines. According to her majesty's 007s, Italy did not take part in a European mass surveillance telecommunications network - run by the British GCHQ (the government agency charged with signals intelligence, SIGINT) together with Germany, Sweden, France and Spain - because "Italians are incompetent and are not willing to collaborate between them".

There are two reasons why the British have no competence or knowledge to assess, from a technical point of view, whether the Italians are truly incompetent. The first one is that SIGINT activities are the most covert aspect of any intelligence agency's operations (and thus it is quite hard for competitors to have enough evidence on this subject). Secondly, such an activity is shared solely among those Secret Services that are traditionally collaborative. And this is not the case in the relationship between the British (MI-5 or MI-6 for whom the GCHQ works) and the Italians.

The "lack" of collaboration between Italian and British intelligence agencies is the result of past diffidence, British snobbish attitude, asymmetric collaboration requests and, lastly, the fact that the English are part of a global intelligence network (especially in the interception of communications) run by the United States (and that features other loyal anglo-saxons as the Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders). From the Italian's point of view, it is thus more worthwhile collaborating directly with the Americans than with their subordinates. It should also be noted that the U.S. have a greater leverage on Italian politics when it comes to rewarding faithful collaborators within the Italian intelligence agencies with promotions and honors (as is the case with some current heads of those institutions).

There are then also the limits imposed on the Services' activities by Italian law. Interceptions and wiretaps require the approval of a judge. It is hence difficult for any Italian intelligence agency to serenely operate in international mass surveillance with the danger of facing prosecution from authorities at home.

Probably the only true accusation formulated by the British is the contentious nature of the relationship between AISE, Italy's external intelligence agency, and AISI, the homeland intelligence agency. This is unfortunately a recurrent aspect. The conflict between the two agencies is the result of their history.

### **Law n. 801 of 1977**

Exactly on October 24 1977, the Italian Parliament passed a new law, n. 801/1977, whose intent was to discipline Italy's entire intelligence apparatus. SID (Defense Information Service), then under the Defense Chief of Staffs, was dissolved and two parallel organisms were created: SISMI (Military Security Information Service) and SISDE (Democratic Security Information Service).

The reason behind such a decoupling lied in the logic guiding those who had wanted this reform: the creation of two organism instead of one meant, de facto, weakening the power of an intelligence structure that in the past had been accused of plots, deviations, coup

d'états and a series of negative acts undermining the safeguard of democracy. This pushed the two neo-born Services to not being philosophically inclined to collaboration, but rather to competition (that also postulated the reciprocal "control" over one another's activities). Another qualifying element was that now intelligence activities were taken away from the military, that had had exclusive control over them until then, and put them under the aegis of two Ministries: Defense (for SISMI) and Interior (SISDE). Law 801 also designated the Prime Minister as the person politically responsible for intelligence activities. The PM would then delegate their control to a dedicated Under Secretary. But, as a matter of fact, both intelligence structures also referred to their designated Ministries, also lead by politicians. An institutional mishmash that definitely did not favor cooperation or synergies.

Whether this contraption really guaranteed the democratic hold over intelligence activities is debatable. The only certain fact in 1977 was that, at least contextually, the operative unity of intelligence gathering was weakened. It is also true that law 801 set the creation of a coordination organism, CESIS (Executive Committee for Information and Security Services), but over the years this structure has performed a merely bureaucratic function. It basically acted as a secretariat for the Under Secretary delegated with the control over intelligence. The truth is CESIS has never controlled neither of the Secret Services and both have kept a constant conflicting competition.

But those who drafted the law wanted politics to take over and control intelligence activities. Whether this happened in a disorderly and organically debatable way was of little importance.

### **A controversial history**

This was the nemesis of the history of Italian intelligence agencies. A past filled with suspicions, insinuations and political maneuvers that regularly called for cleansing, controls and democratic tests.

It had been the so for SIM (Military Information Service) first, dissolved after the war (in the intention of "cleansing" fascist era infiltrations), then for SIFAR (Armed Forces Information Service), abolished in 1965 (following the accusations against Gen. Giovanni De Lorenzo of organizing a coup), and finally for SID, decoupled on the wave of suspicions and allegations into SISMI and SISDE in 1977.

The ordeal did not cease after this reform because on March 17 1981 a list of people belonging to the masonic lodge of the Great Orient of Italy (Propaganda 2, aka P2) was found. In it were the names of 962 individuals, 208 out of them were army officials, including the heads of all intelligence agencies (Walter Pelosi from CESIS, Giuseppe Santovito from SISMI and Giulio Grassini from SISDE). This showed how the decoupling of intelligence activities had not granted their democratic reliability. In fact, the P2 had provided a masonic reply to the weakening of the Services' operations.

Nevertheless, and this is the core of the British accusations, the competition between the two intelligence structures that started in 1977 has continued until the present day.

It was immediately evident that the division envisioned by the 1977 bill between a Service dedicated to operations abroad, SISMI (that still maintained the control over counterespionage and anti-proliferation on national soil), and its domestic counterpart, SISDE, was a hybrid difficult to solve. Both Services initially created and maintained their own information structures abroad and at home. During Riccardo Malpica's tenure, chief of SISDE from 1987 until 1991, the attempts to place men outside Italy were subject to continuous reprisals from SISMI, formally the only structure allowed to be present abroad. The same happened, in a regime of reciprocity, for SISMI's activities at home.

The duel between these two parallel structures also had an impact on the relationship with foreign intelligence Services. Both SISMI and SISDE negotiated their own collaborations, information exchange programs, contacts and channels of communication without letting their competitor know about the contents and the deals signed. This has led not only to a squandering of energies and resources, but also to a discrepancy in the contents that were time after time exchanged with their foreign counterparts. All of this has created the paradox that some joint operations were carried out in parallel and both SISMI and SISDE were unaware of what the other was doing. The same happened for foreign delegations invited to Italy without the other agency's prior knowledge, or for training courses and supplies provided in a framework of national competition. This void was often exploited by some foreign intelligence Services that have tried to capitalize on informations and collaborations.

### **The 2007 reform**

Given such a picture and after three decades of negative experience, the Italian political class decided to restore some order in this issue. The new semantic configuration has turned the Services into "Agencies": AISE (Agency for Informations and External Security) and AISI (Agency for Informations and Internal Security).

Law n. 124 of August 3 2007 has maintained the division of tasks between those operating abroad (AISE) and those working on domestic soil (AISI). The distinction is based on a "territorial" criteria, rather than on "operational assignments". The result is that some structures and duties that once belonged to SISMI (now AISE) - mainly counterespionage - were passed onto AISI. Obviously, first those structures dedicated to these tasks were dismantled (officially they merged with the new Agency), as if this were a normal procedure regarding men and their assignments.

By doing so, a delicate job, made of secret operations, sometimes on the legal borderline, that employs qualified sources operating on a confidential basis that are not easily passed on from one organization to another or even from one overseer to another, was totally disregarded. But this was an aspect that had no value for both the politician and the legislator. The result is that several tasks were passed on lacking all the know how that made them efficient.

The legislator also intervened on the pair "territory"- "operational assignments" with one exception: anti-proliferation activities. They remained in the hands of AISE also on national soil. This waiver was the result of American and Israeli pressure to maintain a structure



with which they had built, over time, a preferential relationship (mainly with its chiefs that have been supported in a brilliant career).

One of the benefits of law n. 124/2007 was that it took the two agencies away from the aegis of their respective ministries (Interior and Defense), reassigning the responsibility of their operations directly to the Prime Minister. By doing so, at least one political filter over the operations of the two Agencies was removed and determined efforts were made towards the coordination between these two organisms. In fact, the old CESIS was replaced by the DIS (Department for Information and Security), whose power to control over the two Agencies was increased.

This does not mean contradictions have not emerged: a unique training school was founded under the DIS, but some operational trainings were assigned to the Agencies. The same effort led to the unification under a unique administration of the two Agencies, even though the management of the "reserved" portion of their budget - that is out of ordinary administrative channels and represents the most substantial part of available funds - was left to the Agencies. Even though employment proposals have to come from the Agencies themselves, recruitment and logistics have also been centralized. In practice, instead of centralizing and optimizing resources and activities, the reform has given room to a duplication of structures.

One last observation concerns the fact that the chief of the new-born DIS is not an intelligence expert, someone knowledgeable of how Agencies operate and sensible to the problems arising from overlapping tasks. It surely wasn't a technical choice to assign the post to Ambassador Giampiero Massolo, whose diplomatic career solely features, in an early age, a two year experience in Moscow (where he could have learnt the ropes in a post where intelligence is strongly supportive of diplomacy). He landed at the head of DIS for an internal row at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Massolo was Secretary General at the Farnesina and his role, rank and seniority were superior to those of Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, former Italian ambassador to Washington DC, that had been named Minister of Foreign Affairs by Mario Monti's technocratic government. There was hence an "incompatibility" that was solved by assigning Giampiero Massolo at the DIS. The usual technique of "promoveatur ut amoveatur".

Putting aside the dissertation on the congruity in the hiring of the heads of the Services, the latent conflict between the two Agencies is still unsolved and strikes a sour note. To this regard, law n. 124 of 2007 outlines mechanisms, provides directives and methods, but is still incapable of unraveling the veil of distrust and competition that hinders any hypothesis of bilateral collaboration.

The link between the Agencies and their former respective Ministries has remained, also because two military officials lead the two organizations and they still value gravitating towards those entities they belonged to or were hired by previously. Also in this case, and especially during the tenure of Admiral Bruno Branciforte (AISE) and of Giorgio Piccirillo (AISI), the competition was transferred to their respective ministries (Defense and Interior) and between the Ministers themselves. The "fight" was over illegal immigration, that both politicians wanted to use for personal political gains. This circumstance prevented the flow

of information on an issue regarding transnational crimes. This happened, for example, with the Italian police officials based in Tripoli with regard to the Agency's representatives in Libya. During that same period, a guideline issued by the chiefs of AISI concerning the escort of the Prime Minister (a task assigned to AISI) forbade contacting AISE representatives during the PM's trips abroad.

For what we know, such a state of the art is still unchanged, as indirectly confirmed by the British intelligence Services.

## **EQUATORIAL GUINEA AND THE SILENCE OF THE MANY**

The history of Equatorial Guinea is emblematic of what is recurrent in the rest of Africa: a long colonial period of occupation, an independence that coincides with the birth of a dictatorship, a regime that slowly turns into a family saga. Amidst it all, a number of attempted coup d'etats, which are obviously participated by mercenaries. Lastly, the guilty silence of the rest of the world which, as is true with EG, has more interest in the oil revenues coming from this minuscule nation than with the systematic violation of human rights that the regime enacts without remorse nor limits. These events are so common in the reality of African life that they are not newsworthy anymore.

### **A family affair**

The history and hardship of Equatorial Guinea begin with its independence, on October 12, 1968, after centuries of colonialism under various flags and territorial configurations – Portuguese, Spanish, French, British and German.

A first presumed coup d'etat in March 1969 was sufficient to allow the nation's first president, Macias Nguema, to plunge the new-born democracy into a never ending involutive spyral and to start the repression of any and all opposition to the despot (with both selective and mass murders). There followed the end of diplomatic relations with Spain, the persecution of Christians (despite their representing about 90% of the country's population), the arrival of Cuban bodyguards, the adhesion to Marxism and the inclusion of EG into the Soviet sphere of influence. It is in this particular context that Equatorial Guinea became a player in the liberation wars raging across africa at the time alongside the Angolan MPLA. President Macias Nguema was an African-styled communist, who did not mind publicly expressing his appreciation for the likes of Adolf Hitler.

History teaches us that dictatorships feed and favor equally repressive attempts at emulation. It was thus inevitable that another coup d'etat on August 3, 1979, would cause the ousting of Macias Nguema by Teodoro Obiang Nguema, his nephew. Colonel and head of the army, Teodoro was assisted and supported by Gabon (where another dictator was affirming himself for what would be another long-lasting despotic reign, Omar Bongo).

The institutional snapshot of Equatorial Guinea is still frozen on that August 3<sup>rd</sup> because Teodoro Nguema has held on to power ever since. His presidential duty has gone through several electoral confirmations backed by “plebiscital” percentages (1989, 1996, 2002, 2009) due to an opposition, or rather what was left of it after the numerous physical eliminations, that is either rotting in prison or has found refuge overseas. To this scenario we should add some numbers on the EG population that counts 6 to 7 hundred thousand Guineans if we leave out the diaspora, with an esteemed million individuals dwelling abroad. In May 2013 parliamentary elections were held. On the eve of these elections, as often occurs, there were mass arrests among the ranks of the opposition. The result: the Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro's party, has won all the seats save one in both branches of the parliament.

In the course of the years, the Cuban bodyguards were substituted by Moroccan ones (in exchange for EG's refusal to recognize the Saharawi population in Morocco). Today US private contractors train the country's security forces and guarantee the safety of the dictator and the survival of the regime. The alliances have also changed: from China, USSR, Vietnam and North Korea to – thanks to the oil fields – United States, Spain, France and the UK. The relationship with the Catholic church has also changed, as Teodoro allows religious freedom to a certain degree. All other freedoms are disallowed: the freedom to assemble, to associate, the freedom of opinion and of expression. There are no political parties (or rather: there are parties and they are authorized to exist since 1991, but it is difficult to exercise such right when their members are systematically jailed and repressed) or labor unions.

Teodoro Obiang Nguema exercises his dictatorship with no bonds whatsoever. He is made strong by his oil fields and their correlated energetic interests.

### **Dynastic dictatorships**

The new phase coming up for Equatorial Guinea is that of passing on the dictatorship in a dynastic context. It is no novelty, the world is filled with similar cases: Kim Jong Un in North Korea, Bashar al Assad in Syria and, without moving to the other end of the globe, the son of Omar Bongo Ondimba, Ali, in Gabon.

Yet Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who is now aged 71 (In a country where the average life expectancy is 53 years, one of the lowest in the world), is a prudent character. He has capitalized on the social message spread by the Arab Spring and now has a problem to solve: the scarce capacity and consideration that his natural heir, "Teodorin" Nguema Obiang Mangué, has among Guineans and non-Guineans. Teodorin is the son of Teodoro's first wife and has already been involved in a case of money laundering in France in 2012. The French magistrates have issued an international arrest warrant through Interpol and have seized a luscious apartment in Paris, valuable works of art, a Rolls Royce, two Bentleys, one Ferrari, two Porsches, an Aston Martin and a Peugeot 607. The seizure was later changed into a mandate valid only within the Schengen zone and Teodorin's wealth was returned to its "rightful" owner. The late change in plans by the French was triggered in part by the arrest in Malabo of the French head of Transparency International. Teodorin had him released thanks to his diplomatic passport.

The same happened in the United States. Young Teodorin owned a luxury villa in Malibu, California, where he also collected Ferraris, has a private Gulfstream jet and other trifles. The seizures in the US add up to a net value of 71 million dollars and it appears that part of this wealth comes directly from the "gratuitous" donations of generous American oil companies. Teodorin is famous for his crazy shopping. The birthday parties that he organizes border the legendary. In 2011 he came into the spotlight for buying a super-yacht worth 235 million pounds. In the same year he had lost his bag in Swaziland with 250 thousand pounds inside. Teodorin is an unstable character with a controversial conduct, but he is the son of the president nonetheless.

All of these things happen in a country where the per capita income is about 30 thousand dollars per year, but where 78% of the population lives with about 1 dollar per day and 85% of them dwell in shanty-towns without water nor electricity. All companies that operate in EG are in some way related to the family network of president Obiang. In every company there is a representative from the government. In order to get a job in any of these companies, this representative must be paid a bribe.

As we mentioned, the wealth of Teodorin is the fruit of corruption. It is no wonder that according to many international organizations, EG is one of the most corrupt countries on the planet. Transparency International places EG among the first 12 corrupt countries in the world. When speaking of freedom (political, civil, etc.) it is sufficient to read "Freedom in the World" to get a pulse of the situation.

Teodorin's father is cautious because he knows that, after the death of Omar Bongo and the elimination of Khadafi, he is presently the longest lasting dictator living in the African continent. And ending up like his uncle Macias, whom Obiang had murdered for "crimes against humanity", fits the logic of things in EG. Meanwhile, Teodorin was named second Vice-President in May 2012, a new office that was created through a makeover of the constitution (the same makeover has further increased the already all-powerful role of the president), thus making him the natural replacement for his father.

### **The economy of human rights**

Although the world is filled with dictators and the consequent violations of human rights – which causes inurement among the public opinion – what is it that allows the Guinean president to get away with all of these odious violations without joining the ranks of rogue states against which the rage of the world is often directed?

The first answer to this question is of a "technical" nature. Equatorial Guinea has an esteemed 11 billion barrel strong oil reserve. Its gas reserves are just as gargantuan. The country is presently among the major exporters of hydrocarbon in Africa. US companies such as Exxon Mobil, Hess and Marathon, Chinese, French and Spanish companies are all interested, to different degrees, in the exploitation of such reserves. In the oil industry, investments in the initial exploration and drilling phases are very high. The revenues are produced in the medium-long term (the first Guinean oil fields were discovered in 1994). Those that pursue profits have little interest in human rights. And corruption helps all the parties keep cordial relationships with one another. There is no interest among powerful western nations to bring up the issue of a bloodthirsty regime. Even the USA, which were initially hostile to the oppressive methods of Obiang Nguema, have progressively lowered the volume of their protests. Much of the Guinean petrol ends up in the United States. In 2009 Teodoro Obiang Nguema even met Barack Obama in New York and took part in a heartwarming family portrait together with the US president.

Even Spain, EG's former colonial power, has a special connection with its former colony (there is even an officer of the CNI that is stationed in Malabo, the capital of EG, for intelligence cooperation). Spain allegedly offered their support for an attempted coup d'etat in 2004, during the government of Jose Maria Aznar, when a group of mercenaries

led by Briton Simon Francis Mann wanted to oust Obiang and replace him with an exiled opposition leader, former seminarist Severo Moto. The attempt failed when Mann's team was arrested in Zimbabwe where they were supposed to pick up their weapons and now Madrid has rekindled its relationship with president Obiang. In 2008, Severo Moto went from being a political refugee to being accused of dealing arms and had to fight his way through Spanish court to see his status of exiled oppositor confirmed. In the end profits have prevailed over conscience in Spain as well.

There is a certain cunning on the part of the dictator in cultivating or humoring relations with those nations that can help his cause. The Guinean constitution says that the official languages of EG are Spanish (the most diffused language after the local tongue) and French. Since 2007, Portuguese has been added to the list. In practice, most of the former colonial powers have been indulged. And Obiang spends huge amounts of money in public relations each year. He went so far as financing a UNESCO prize which was never assigned due to the international protests that followed. In 2011 Obiang hosted a summit of the African Union in Malabo (the summit coincided with the arrest of oppositors, students, politicians and immigrants). In 2012 he managed to host, together with his Gabonese friends, the African Cup of Nations, one of the most important football tournaments of the African continent.

### **Sunday's Catholics**

The second reason for Obiang's lasting rule is of a "religious" character. As we have said, the Christian faith is prevalent in EG. Other common practices are animists, the voodoo rite and a number of Christian sects. Yet the preponderant faith is the Catholic faith. The interest of the regime with regards to the Vatican is due to the threat represented by the aforementioned Christian sects. Headed by African preachers (Nigerians, Ghanese, Congolese), they collect huge amounts of funding and often practice exorcisms that end up in the murder of innocent individuals. Teodoro Obiang Nguema also knows that the benevolence of the Vatican helps him in preserving his image.

On October 2013, Nguema landed in Italy with his wife and visited Pope Francesco in the Vatican for a 15 minute chat. He then met the archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Vatican Secretary for Relationships with foreign States. During the meeting the two exchanged documents that ratify the bilateral accord undersigned by the two nations on October 13, 2012 in Mongomo. The accord certifies good bilateral relations between the two nations and recognizes the juridic person of the Church and its institutions. It also touches upon the canonic wedding, the assistance to the Catholics in hospitals and prisons, the exercise of free cult and other similar amenity. The silence of the Vatican on the notorious evil deeds of Obiang's regime goes to join the solemn silence that surrounds everything that happens in EG. Even the silence of Italy, where there was no form of protest against the arrival of the dictator.

Teodoro Obiang Nguema's dictatorship is based on solid social prerequisites. The first is the scarce population of EG, which ensures the regimes control over its inhabitants. The nation's geographical extension is also scant (about 28 thousand square km's) and is divided between the coastline and the island of Bioko in the Gulf of Guinea. The second

social prerequisite is of a tribal nature. Teodoro is a Fang like a good 85% of Guinea's population and belongs to the sub-ethnic group of the Mongolo. The victims of his oppression are thus usually the Bubi, which dwell on the island of Bioko. One of their leaders, Martin Puye, who headed the Movement for self-determination of the island of Bioko, died in the regime's prisons in 1998.

Teodoro Obiang Nguema controls, through his militias, all of the strategic areas in the country. The object of his attention are mostly politicians, activists and journalists. It is easy to land in the regime's aims: a protest (perhaps because of the lack of drinkable water), a critique, an unlikeable comment suffices. There follows arbitrary arrests, detentions, vanishings, tortures, extra-judicial executions, threats and piloted trials by a judicial system that serves the regime.

According to Human Rights Watch, the country is a leader in: corruption, poverty and repression. Equatorial Guinea is one of those rare cases where the citizens of an independent nation regret the colonial occupation, when the quality of life was inversely proportional to the wealth of the country they were living in. Yet this does not prevent Teodoro Obiang Nguema from holding on to power among the silence of the many.