

# A President, His Generals and a Buccaneer: Vincent Miclet's Angolan (Mis)Adventures

When [Le Monde profiled the African-born businessman Vincent Miclet](#) in November 2018, it called him the “Gatsby” of Francophone Africa. The inference was clear: opulence and decadence combined in a single name.

Gatsby was the fatally-flawed character in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, whose fabulous wealth was obtained through mysterious - and possibly illegal - means and whose machinations led to his downfall. Vincent Miclet was presented as somewhat exotic: a slick, fifty-something millionaire playboy, born and educated at Baccalaureate level in Africa, his business acumen, in his own words, “self-taught”. In a self-serving interview with *Le Monde*, Miclet hoped to portray himself as a business genius cheated by Angola's corrupt generals. (However, the businessman did not respond the questionnaire sent to him for this article.)

## Buddies and bribes

According to *Liberation*, Miclet owes his business success to a combination of showy connections and bribery (in French: [“Bling Bling et Bakchichs”](#)). It was thanks to his French-African connections that Miclet expanded his business interests across Africa, launching him to number 180 on France's rich list. And, as Miclet himself told *Le Monde*, “In Africa, you can't do business without paying commission (baksheesh).” And he proudly admitted that his personal commission on deals was 30 per cent.

For 20 years Vincent Miclet had operated under the radar. However, a relationship with a French reality TV celebrity in 2013 propelled him onto France's gossip pages. They gleefully documented this divorcé's life of luxurious excess during his four years with glamorous Ayem Nour, with whom he fathered a son. [Pictures of the couple](#) showed a man in his early fifties with plump unlined features, streaky blonde highlights, and a receding hairline.

After the split from Ayem Nour (which he publicly and unchivalrously blamed on

his interfering mother-in-law, Farida), he sold their vast villa in the Dordogne for nearly 30 million euros. The sumptuous Moroccan palace he calls home is reputed to rival that of the King of Morocco. It's where he played host to the notorious Alexandre Benalla, the former bodyguard of French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron, who was fired after he violently attacked the May 1<sup>st</sup> protesters.

*How did the son of non-profit workers become so rich and well-connected? Born in modest circumstances to French non-profit volunteers in Chad, Miclet portrays himself as a self-made business genius - but many suspect that his good fortune can be attributed to modern-day buccaneering.*

According to *Le Libre Penseur*, Miclet's French-African network was built on connections to the [Masons and Corsican Mafiosi](#). *Libération* reported that Miclet hired Benalla as a bodyguard for the mother of his child and then engineered a new career for him via another friend, the veteran French-African business fixer Philippe Hababou Solomon. Miclet is also reported to have been [the link between Benalla and Marc Francelet](#), another interesting Frenchman whose criminal record seems to have presented no obstacle to his [security connections](#).

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[After his school days in Africa](#), Miclet set up his first company, Cash Distribution (a cargo transport company) in 1984. He was 19. Within five years he had entered the food supply business, expanding from dried fish to oil, tomatoes and rice - allegedly becoming the number one importer of rice to Congo.

His entry into Angola is said to have come about thanks to the [Féliciaggi family connections](#) (the Féliciaggis had connections to Congo, the Corsican mafia and the disgraced former French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua).

According to *Liberation*, "It was the Corsican connection that led Miclet directly to Angola, where a general close to the president opened the doors to juicy business deals supplying contracts."

By 1995, he was already reported as partnering with China to supply food and

uniforms to the Angolan Armed Forces before diversifying into international logistics and construction. He also went into a joint venture with the French company Necotrans to establish and operate a port terminal in the Angolan capital, Luanda, which, he boasted, was the largest refrigeration plant in Africa.

So what went wrong? Why was he forced to make a hasty exit from Angola amid complaints of undelivered goods and missing millions?

### **Victim or villain?**

In *Le Monde*, Vincent Miclet alleged he was the victim of a cabal of corrupt Angolan generals. He painted himself as the king of imports in Angola, in partnership with then Minister of State and Presidential Security Chief, General Manuel Hélder Vieira Dias Júnior “Kopelipa”.

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He wasn’t lying; his pre-eminence in the import sector came about because the Angolan élite needed a straw man when they ousted the previous “king of imports”, the Lebanese businessman, Kassim Tajideen. Tajideen (currently serving a prison term in the USA) was the majority owner of the Arosfran Group of companies, (amongst them Afri Belg, Golfrate and Muteba), which together imported \$50 million-dollars-worth of foodstuffs per month, that is \$600 million a year.

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Feijó and Kopelipa came up with a scheme to create a new company that they named Nova Distribuidora Alimentar e Diversos, Lda (NDAD), which aimed to buy out the entire assets of the Arosfran Group in Angola (including 170 warehouses) for \$150 million. Another of President Dos Santos’s close associates, General

Leopoldino Fragoso do Nascimento “Dino”, obtained a personal loan of \$150 million to this end from the Angolan Investment Bank (Banco Angolano de Investimento, BAI).

Several highly-placed sources told *Maka Angola* that Feijó and Kopelipa co-opted Vincent Miclet and his secretary, Adélia Bandeira El-Bichuti, into lending their names to the company to mask the involvement of politically-exposed persons. Miclet omits this detail from his account. He says he negotiated directly with Kassim Tajideen’s lawyer, Rui Ferreira, for the buy-out.

Yet by 2011 Ferreira had left his legal practice upon being appointed President of the Constitutional Court (today he is Supreme Court President). Questioned by *Maka Angola*, Judge Ferreira justified his role, denying a conflict of interest (which would have been contrary to Angolan law): “It’s true that I was across the sale of the Arosfran Group to NDAD in 2011 and that I had a semi-supervisory role in the process,” he stated. “As is well known, I was a lawyer in private practice for 23 years, between 1985 and 2008. And during that time, I was the legal consignor for a number of the companies in the Arosfran Group, including Golfrate and Afribelg, which belonged to Kassim Tajideen. Back then it was the largest organisation in the field of food distribution in Angola, in particular for essentials.”

However, upon his appointment to the Constitutional Court, Rui Ferreira ceased to represent his previous clients. When the Angolan President decided Kassim Tajideen had to be forced out of Angola, his Chiefs of Staff consulted Judge Ferreira, as he recalls: “They [Carlos Feijó and General Kopelipa] approached me to request my assistance on a matter of national interest. Because of the trust and respect I’d established with Tajideen over the many years of our previous professional relationship, they sought my help to persuade him to agree to an exit deal. They argued that this was a delicate matter of exceptional national interest in that a quick agreement needed to be reached, without dispute, so as not to affect essential food supplies.”

Judge Ferreira’s former client, Kassim Tajideen, was suspicious that the Angolan government was trying to oust him without payment and the President’s envoys needed Ferreira to serve as an unofficial go-between, simply to reassure Tajideen that he would be fully compensated. In these circumstances, said Rui Ferreira, “I agreed. Because it was a request from my country’s government which

considered that I was uniquely placed to help them resolve this process, which was in the national interest.” He emphasised that there was no remuneration or other benefit to him and justified his role as an act of patriotism and good citizenship.

“I did what I did. It was nothing more than an unpaid ‘good offices mission’ required of me by my country’s government in the national interest,” he explained. “Both parties accepted that this was a ‘good offices mission’ and welcomed it. I did not act (in an official capacity as lawyer) for either party, but simply as a facilitator of the agreement.”

## **Miclet and NDAD**

The contract for the sale of all the Arosfran Group’s assets was signed on 7 June 2011 by Kassim Tajideen and Vincent Miclet, the latter signing in his capacity as a “partner and manager of NDAD”. Out of the \$150 million bank loan obtained by General Dino, two-thirds (\$100 million) was paid directly to Kassim Tahjideen in September 2011 to compensate him for his expulsion from Angola. (He is banned from returning to Angola for a period of 20 years.)

As for the other part of the BAI loan (\$50 million), well, it simply vanished.

Rui Ferreira admits that he was kept in the dark on the finer points of the deal: “Only some months later, after the fact, and without my being officially informed, did I hear on the grapevine who the real owners of NDAD were.” He names no names but sources have told *Maka Angola* that the real owners were Generals Kopelipa and Dino.

For his part Kopelipa’s erstwhile civilian colleague at the Office of the President categorically denies any involvement in NDAD. “The fact someone worked or held a senior position in the Office of the Presidency doesn’t mean they automatically enjoy illicit advantages of any kind,” said Carlos Feijó. (That was his only government role, from 2010 to 2012, after which he returned to the private sector and academic life. He’s currently a tenured Professor of Law at Agostinho Neto University.)

Feijó confirmed to *Maka Angola* that the expulsion of Tajideen and the compulsory purchase of the Arosfran Group were the result of a United Nations subpoena received by the Foreign Ministry of Angola regarding Tajideen’s links to

Hezbollah. “I immediately advised [the President] that we must comply without hesitation. My understanding, from the constitutional and legal point of view, was that the Angolan State could not directly intervene and confiscate [the business] as we have no law providing for confiscation of assets unless there has been a guilty verdict in a court of law.”

“At the same time”, said Feijó, “we had to be cognisant of the fact that the Arosfran Group was the main operator in the import and sale of the vast majority of foodstuffs, in particular what we refer to as the ‘essential basket of goods’, and that any action taken against Arosfran could have a grave impact on the inflation rate which we were at pains to control.”

For these reasons, it was believed that the best solution would be to find a private Angolan-owned company to acquire the real estate and assets of the commercial companies in the Arosfran Group.

According to Carlos Feijó, “As General Dino led Kero [a supermarket chain] and had knowledge and experience of the market, he was charged with finding a financial solution, which involved taking out a loan from the BAI.” “Dino arranged the BAI financing. I was not part of what followed. The rest is a private matter which had nothing to do with me.”

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“All I know is that, from a business point of view, there was a decision to set up an Angolan commercial company and use that for the subsequent acquisition of the Arosfran Group”, explained Feijó. “There was a legitimate contract of sale and purchase of the Arosfran Group’s real estate and assets,” he added.

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To the best of his recollection, Vincent Miclet and his secretary, Adélia Bichuti,

drew up the inventory and valuation of the Arosfram Group based on consultations with Rui Ferreira who had worked with the Group: “To clarify, I mean Rui Ferreira’s private law firm, because I must emphasise that I have no knowledge of whether he was still a partner in that law firm.”

However, once other lawyers took over to draw up the agreement documentation, he says neither he nor General Kopelipa and Dino played any further part in the negotiations. “I must emphasise that I did not see either of the Generals (Kopelipa and Dino) involved in the negotiations. I would say that General Dino’s role was only to arrange the financing.”

Once there was agreement for the sale of the Arosfran Group, the Interior Minister drew up the order to expel Kassim Tajideen from Angola and ban his return. Tajideen was subsequently found guilty of money laundering and funding Hezbollah and was ordered to pay a \$50 million fine. He is currently serving a five-year prison sentence in the United States of America.

Some months later, President Dos Santos replaced Carlos Feijó and by 2013 the latter had returned to his private legal practice and took no further part in public life. His subsequent role was in his capacity as head of a private law firm after he was contacted to “try to resolve a situation in which NDAD was in technical bankruptcy, without the wherewithal to pay off the contracted loan”. From 2013, Feijó’s legal firm supplied a lawyer on monthly retainer to NDAD.

Documents received by *Maka Angola* show that NDAD was bankrupt and incapable of honouring its commitments. At this juncture, General Dino then reappeared to organise the restructuring of the formal shareholder composition of NDAD, with legal assistance from the office of Carlos Feijó.

The remaining \$50 million of the debt to Kassim Tajideen was paid off towards the end of 2013, largely thanks to a second loan of \$45 million obtained from Banco Privado Atlântico (the BPA, since renamed Millenium Atlântico), also arranged by General Dino.

In Feijó’s view, the relationship with Miclet had broken down due to the poor financial situation. He said there was a loss of confidence (in Vincent Miclet) and an erosion of trust between the various parties involved in the creation of NDAD and the takeover of the Arosfran Group. The reason given was Vincent Miclet’s “erratic management” of NDAD and the lack of clarity regarding conflicting

interests between NDAD and Miclet's company Angodis, which also supplied the Angolan Armed Forces.

"The issues between Vincent Miclet, Kopelipa and Dino resulted in General Dino submitting a criminal complaint to the DNIAP [Direcção Nacional de Investigação e Acção Penal - the National Directorate for Criminal Investigation and Action]. I didn't see it necessarily as a criminal situation but rather a civil matter which could be resolved through the courts," said Feijó.

## **Adieu, Vincent**

On February 25, 2015, measures were put in place to rescind the 80 per cent stock quota allocated in the name of Vincent Miclet and the 20 per cent quota in the name of Adélia El-Bichuti and re-allocate them instead to Paulo César Rocha Rasgado (80 per cent) and Samora Borges Sebastião Albino (20 per cent) both of whom were frontmen for General Dino. The process made no reference to any compensation or payment to the outgoing "partners". After all, they were not the real owners.

However, Vincent Miclet then demanded a pay-off of \$56.6 million as "recompense for the acquisition of merchandise by three of his companies" - Pointpark Limited (registered in Dubai), Taycast Investment Limited (also registered in Dubai) and Angodis - Angola Distribuição, Lda.

The already murky situation was further complicated by grave doubts about the legality of the transactions between them. The contract to supply the Defence Ministry was not with Angodis but his other firm Pointpark; however, Angodis received payments on Pointpark's behalf.

There is documentary evidence that nefarious schemes were afoot. For example, on 30 May 2015 Angodis wrote to General Kopelipa and the then Defence Minister, Cândido Van-Dúnem, to effect the return of \$64 million "received in error". *Maka Angola* has not been able to verify whether the sum was, in fact, returned.

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## *Armed Forces.*

In his written reply to Angodis, dated July 18, Lieutenant-General Francisco Firmino Jacinto (Director of the National Directorate for Administration and Finance at the Defence Ministry) begins by explaining the [erroneous] transfers as having been a “budgetary manoeuvre...to avoid their having to withdraw this amount from the Finance Ministry”.

It seems fair to say that the arrangement between Miclet’s companies and the Angolan Defence Ministry were not entirely above board. One of the best documented examples of theft by Miclet’s companies was that they devised a strategy to hold back a proportion of the supplies delivered to the Angolan Armed Forces. Paperwork prepared by senior officials working for Angodis, Pointpark and NDAD show that between 2011 and 2013 Miclet’s companies kept back \$20 million of food that was already paid for.

### **Everyone wanted a piece of the pie**

Vincent Miclet committed his version of events to paper in a report for the then President José Eduardo dos Santos, a copy of which was obtained by *Maka Angola*. In it, he says negotiations [to acquire the Arosfran Group] began in April 2011 and were chaired by “Mr Rui Ferreira, in the presence of the interested parties”.

He went on to state: “On April 7, 2011, Mr Rui Ferreira drew up and signed a contract for the sale and purchase of the fixed and liquid assets of the commercial branch of the Arosfran Group.” He said that initially the Group had demanded \$327.3 million but eventually settled for \$144.5 million.

Further: “On April 5, 2011, on ‘orders from above’ [generally understood as coming from the Angolan President], the BAI bank granted a loan for the purpose of payment for the contractually agreed price for the parcel of assets as signed by the parties, with the transfer taking effect on July 20, 2011 of US \$100 million to the Alicommerce company.”

Miclet said that thereafter he used his own funds to restructure the company and pay for imports. But his summary of events gives the game away when he refers to an intervention by the President’s sister, Marta dos Santos, being interpreted

as “treachery” by the “partners” (Generals Kopelipa and Dino). The fact is that they were the real owners of NDAD, not Miclet. He simply lent his name to the enterprise and ‘managed’ the company on their behalf until it was more or less bankrupt and they lost faith in him.

Why was NDAD was in such financial distress? Perhaps because the key figures were bleeding the company dry. Although NDAD reported profits of \$1.5 million in its first year of operation, former employees agreed that there was no transparent accounting system in place. Indeed, NDAD’s accounts were handled by Adélia Bandeira, an accountant with Miclet’s firm, Angodis. A former NDAD executive told us: “We [NDAD staffers] had no means of knowing the day-to-day financial situation of the firm.”

With NDAD nominally under new “management”, things came to a head in August of 2013 when Miclet flew his private jet to Luanda for the transfer of powers to Paulo Rasgado and Samora Albino. His jet was prevented from leaving. A furious Miclet blamed General Dino.

As his price for stepping away from NDAD, Miclet is said to have demanded compensation of \$82.5 million, which he claimed was the value he had injected into the restructuring of the business and its import activities. After an audit by Deloitte, his erstwhile “partners” offered him a sweetener of \$26 million, which Miclet rejected.

In spite of his ouster, Miclet tried to regroup, in particular via his new oil and gas venture, Petroplus Overseas. But according to [African Intelligence](#) (IOL 814) his firm has “lost the lion’s share of its portfolio” in Gabon as well as its permits in Mali. Having taken so much of the pie over the past couple of decades, it appears Vincent may have bitten off more than he could chew.

*\*D. Quaresma Santos contributed to the English version of this report.*