

EDITORIAL

AFRICAN HISPANIC LITERARY EXPRESSION: THE LITERATURE OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA

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Over the past few years, African literature of Spanish expression has experienced a renewed interest in Spain and abroad given the number of academic, conferences, seminars, lectures that have devoted space and time to this literary production. Until the mid-1990s, the literary production of Equatorial Guinea, the only sub-Saharan country with a literature expressed in Spanish, had received scant critical and theoretical attention.

The republic of Equatorial Guinea is located in the Gulf of Guinea, or Biafra, between Gabon, Cameroon, and Nigeria to a lesser extent. It is the only African country in sub-Saharan Africa with a Hispanic political and historical heritage. Equato-Guinean historian, writer, and journalist Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo asserts that Equato-Guinean literature “es la única expresión española en el África negra.” This literature is unique and original in that, whereas French, English, and Portuguese language are shared by many African countries, Spanish is only spoken in Equatorial Guinea. However, Equato-Guinean literature, like other African literary expressions written in transcontinental languages is a hybrid cultural creation, for it is the expression of two literary traditions: European, i.e., Spanish in this case, marked by the strict and rigid norms of scripture, and African, from Bantu language group, that is, Ndowe, Fang, or Bubi to mention a few, characterized by the more flexible and pragmatic rules of orality. Canadian scholar Fernando Lambert describes this phenomenon as a dynamic process of friction between different texts, African and European, at the end of which the African text ends up “devouring” the European text.

In 1953, Leoncio Evita Enoy published *Cuando los combes luchaban* (*Novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española*), the first novel written by a Guinean in Spanish. In 1962, Daniel Jones Mathama published *Una lanza por el boabi*, the second novel by a native Guinean in Spanish. Evita's novel followed the same path and tradition as early African literature(s) in transnational languages in other parts of the continent. First, in *Cuando los combes luchaban*, the story takes a backstage, for the narrator is more focused on the description the combe ethnic realities, that is, their rituals, customs and habitat. Second, the novel was published in Madrid, Spain; its target audience was not in Spanish Guinea, but in the metropolis. The novel was "paraded" in the metropolis through the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas lecture circuit as evidence that Spain civilizing mission in Africa was producing some success. Daniel Jones Mathama was a fernandino. He was a member of the British educated African "aristocracy" of landowners who had migrated to Fernando Poo in order to take advantage of the economic opportunities on the island. The fernandinos were part of the Spanish colonial system and showed allegiance to Spain. *Una lanza por el boabi* is the very expression of what has been described as "litterature de consentement." The narrator uses a very intimate voice to describe, from the distance and with abundant paternalism, the customs, rituals, and habitat of the combes and other groups. The narrative voice is very critical of the authentic inhabitants of the island whom he labels "primitive," "savage" while he praises the colonial situation. Spain is the "motherland."

On October 12, 1968, the territory of Spanish Guinea achieved independence from Spain, and changed its name to Equatorial Guinea. That same year, Francisco Macías Nguema was elected president of the young republic. In March 1969, President Francisco Macías Nguema suspended the constitution and interrupted the democratic process, and proclaimed himself President for life. He established one of the most ruthless dictatorships in early post-independent Africa. Throughout his rule (1969-1979), President Macías Nguema dealt brutally with opponents, civilians and military servicemen who were not members of his (ethnic) clan. During that period, one third of the population fled the country. Most of the literary creation of that period was produced in exile. As a result, exile, as an experience of dislocation, fragmentation, but also as a

process of cultural, political, linguistic, and economic deterritorialization, was narrativized mainly through poetry the main platform for the discourse of resistance. Francisco Macias regime was overthrown in August 1979.

In the early 1980s an important body of literature began to emerge among the Equato-Guinean community that lived in Spain as exiles. This process opens up with Raquel Ilonbé's *Leyendas guineanas* (1981), a collection of traditional stories from different Guinean ethnic groups collected by the author over several visits to Equatorial Guinea. She crisscrossed the country "in search of her roots" as she put it. Then followed two collections of poetry both by Juan Balboa Boneke: *O'Boriba (El exiliado)* (1982) y *Susurros y pensamientos comentados: Desde mi vidriera* (1983) where he reflects on his decade long exile in Spain. In 1984, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published *Antología de la literatura guineana*. It is the first comprehensive attempt to provide a textual overview of Equato-Guinean literature from the colonial period to post-independence. It was also an attempt to pave the way towards the establishment of a literary canon.

In 1985, María Nsue Angüe published *Ekomo*, the first novel in Spanish by a woman in Equatorial Guinea. In 1987, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, which is part of a trilogy whose second part, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, appeared ten years later in 1997. The author then published *El Metro* (2007), and intends to close the cycle with his forthcoming *Los hijos de la tribu*. In 1982, the Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano was opened in Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea. The mission statement of the Centro Cultural reads "la activación de la vida cultural, artística, folklórica, educativa de nuestro país," that is, to promote and disseminate Guinean and Hispanic culture in Equatorial Guinea and abroad. The Centro Cultural used to organize a wide variety of cultural events, including literary and arts contests, book presentations, and lectures, among other activities. In addition to establishing Ediciones del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano, a publishing arm, it also housed the largest library of the country. The Centro housed two publications: *África 2000* and *El Patio*. Both eventually ceased to exist in the early 2000s, but they played a critical role in the dissemination of the literature and arts of Equatorial Guinea in the country and abroad. *África 2000* and *El Patio*

have acquainted the Equato-Guinean readers with authors whose works were published while they were in exile. These journals have also served as a launching pad for young and novice writers from the mid-1980s onward, and have served as the most active and efficient forum of diffusion of Equato-Guinean literature in the 1990s. Texts published during this period include: Antimo Esono Ndongo's (1950-1996) "No encontré flores para mi madre" (1987), "La última lección del venerable Emaga Ela" (1991) and "Afén, la cabrita reina" (1989); Pedro Cristino Bueriberi Bokesa's (1947) "Boote-Chiba, El gran Chiba" (1990); Ciriaco Bokesa Napo's (1939) "Crónica de un viaje singular" (1993); María Nsue Angüe's (1945) "Adugu" (1993); Estaban Bualo Bokamba's "Kogu, el cazador" (1992) and "Unanga" (1996); and María Caridad Riloha's "Exilio" (1997) and "Gusano" (1997). Only two books of poetry were published during this period, Jerónimo Rope Bomabá's *Album Poético* (1994), and Juan-Tomás Ávila Laurel's (1966) *Poemas* (1994). Juan-Tomás Ávila Laurel is one of the most prolific and polyvalent authors in contemporary Equato-Guinean literature with two dozens of titles ranging from short stories, novel, poetry, essay to drama.

The Centro Cultural sponsored a wide variety of authors and works, including Juan Balboa Boneke's *Sueños en mi selva* (1987); Ciriaco Bokesa Napo's *Voces de espumas* (1987); Juan-Tomás Ávila Laurel's *Poemas* (1994); Jerónimo Rope Bomabá's *Álbum poético* (1995), Juan-Tomás Ávila Laurel's *Historia íntima de la humanidad* (1999); Maximiliano Ncogo's *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* (1994), among other titles.

In the 1990s, a new generation of writers began to publish their works in Equatorial Guinea and abroad. Most of them are young authors who did not experience the trauma of Francisco Macías Nguema's dictatorship. Their writings, mostly narrative and poetry, explore contemporary and more universal issues. Texts published during this period include Maximiliano Nkogo Esono's *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* (1994) and Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng's *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) and *Huellas bajo tierra*.

In the 2000s, Equato-Guinean literature has experienced a steady growth in quantity and quality with the emergence of a new generation of writers. Guillermina Mekuy's *El llanto de la perra* (2005) and *Las tres vírgenes de Santo Tomás* (2007); César Mbah Abogo's *El porteador*

de Marlow. Canción negra sin color (2007); José Siale Djangany's *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* (2000), *La revuelta de los disfraces* (2003), and *Autorretrato con un infiel* (2007); Ambrosio Sebastián Ndjeng Angono's *Gafas opacas* (2002); Herminio Treviño's (*Lêdjam, Nánay-Menemôl*) *Búdjigêl* (2008), and Juan M. Davies' *La guerra de Hormelef* (2005), *Abiono* (2004), *Siete días en Bioco* (2007) and *Héroes* (2008) are part of this thriving literary corpus. The literary scene is now more diverse. There are more women writing and publishing their works. Remei Sipi Mayo's *Cuentos Africanos* (2005) and *El secreto del bosque* (2007); Paloma del Sol's *Cuentos africanos* (2006), along with Guillermina Mekuy's novels seem to indicate a growing and promising trend.

African literature in Spanish, or African Hispanic literature, is no longer “a possible literature,” but a full fledge cultural production, that is, a “real literature” in critic Wilfrid Miampika's words. Further, it has the privilege of being part of both African literature in transnational languages, and Hispanic literature(s). That is what makes this literary production original and unique.