

**A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE:
DONATO NDONGO AND *MUNDO NEGRO***

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My first experience of the work of Donato Ndongo goes back to an academic conference on postcolonialism held all of ten years ago at the University of Vigo.¹ There, in the comforting halls of academia, I had expected from Ndongo some undramatic, scholarly, introductory reflections on the particular emerging canon of literature from a country I was blithely ignorant of, knowing it belonged to the Hispanic world in its broadest sense and little more. And I did, in fact, get in part what I was expecting: an overview of a national literature, a narrative that took the audience from the first written expression of the Equatorial Guineans, where historical myths and legends were rendered in written form, to the sophisticated novels of today. Ndongo had of course already published an anthology of Guinean literature (1984)² and was something of an established figurehead of Guinean letters. In a sense he was its official voice. But what was most striking, what really caught my attention was how, to a dramatic degree, reality kept getting in the way; in other words, the extent to which this “national” literature was so contingent on political events: first, in Ndongo’s own words the “doble opresión colonialista y franquista [que] no permitieron el surgimiento de movimientos culturales y literarios del estilo de la Negritude,” and later the reign of unspeakable terror of Francisco Macías, followed by the only slightly more benign dictatorship of Teodoro Obiang (2000: 130).

Contemporary critical commentators do of course underscore the constructedness of cultural canons and do uncover the degree to which political

frameworks and events shape our notions of national literatures. And, accustomed as I was to the dramatic extent to which Irish literature has historically been marked by political tensions, I empathised immediately but also realised the shocking particularity of the Equatorial Guinean case and most especially that of the Macías regime where the plight of the intellectual was death, or exile, or the cultural wasteland that the newly independent state became. As Ndongu has written, the panorama was such as to completely eliminate the possibility of a cultural movement developing:

De manera que sin medios materiales elementales que les permitieran realizar su labor (luz, papel, lápiz...), sin maestros, sin libros, sin estímulos de ninguna especie, y en medio de una persecución tan sañuda en la que murió gente por escribir un poema e incluso una carta, y en un ambiente en el que fueron arrasadas las bibliotecas, en apenas unos años desapareció todo vestigio cultural y, por tanto, cualquier posibilidad de creación y expresión literarias (2000:132).

Consequently, to echo the title of Ndongu's paper back in Vigo, to speak of a national literature in relation to Equatorial Guinea was to speak of a phenomenon which emerged "a pesar de todo."

This, of course, was the context in which Ndongu began to participate in the public sphere. I have mentioned the emergence of a national literature as Ndongu put it "a pesar de todo," yet to speak in such terms is to wrestle protagonism from key individuals, intellectuals who brought this reality about. Ndongu's role was to be a lonely, brave voice trying to be heard in spite of all the difficulties. And if eventually we now begin to have forums³ where the reality of Africa and Equatorial Guinea can be expressed and debated in complexity, and where a Guinean literature can be seen to already have an established and evolving profile, it is important and just to highlight the key pioneering role specific individuals, such as Ndongu, have played in this process.

I was also struck, at that Vigo conference, by how my own reaction of stupor at the enormity of the tragedy of Equatorial Guinea seemed to be shared by the rest of the mostly Spanish audience. Quite simply this was news to them as much as it was news to me. In spite of the fact that Equatorial Guinea along

with the Spanish Sahara had been Spain's only colonies on the African continent and the only colonies through the twentieth century, the audience knew little or nothing about the country and much less about its emerging literature. Ndongo has compared the situation of Guinea to the francophone African countries where the development of a cultural movement like Negritude benefited both from continuity and from the platform of liberty provided by a democratic France, as well as the support of influential intellectuals such as Jean Paul Sartre. Certainly the forum, the space created for this cultural development, was tainted by the power relations that remained from the colonial period and the phenomenon of Negritude has been criticised for following the mould set by the metropolitan power, for, in its insistence on authenticity and a strained nativism, merely attempting to reverse the discriminating racial discourse that Africa has borne for so long, and as a result merely falling into the binary trap.⁴ Indeed, Ndongo himself recognises the derivative nature of the Negritude phenomenon, frequently highlighting the terrible destruction that has been wrought in Africa in the name of authenticity, but equally he does too point out how the space created in Europe by figures such as Sartre did give specific African individuals a platform from which to speak. Notwithstanding its difficulties, with the emergence of the Negritude phenomenon there was unquestionably a place where African voices were now being heard and their concerns began to feature as a relatively prominent part of public discourse, allowing them to muscle in on debates in France and consequently gain purchase on the metropolitan audience as well as back in Africa, and throughout the space and along the routes of what Paul Gilroy has called "The Black Atlantic." The Spain-Guinea axis, however, was instead mostly characterised by silence and by a paucity of intellectual traffic, particularly in the early Macías years when all information from the ex-colony was strictly censored.⁵

Nonetheless, in the case of *Mundo Negro* we find an exception. *Mundo Negro* is in fact the Madrid-based, missionary magazine of the Catholic Comboni order, or *Combonianos* in Spanish. Published since the 1960s, it is an organ that would hardly appear the most appropriate vehicle of expression of an

Equatorial Guinean native given the Church's chequered record in the country, its pedigree scarcely one of respect for native culture.⁶ Yet the degree to which this magazine prioritized the native African voice can be gauged, for example, by looking at how earlier this year Donato Ndongo's regular monthly column, "Al margen de la noticia," was usurped, to use the contributor's words, by the magazine's retiring editor, Gerardo González Calvo, in order to use it as a valedictory address to the magazine's public. The title of the column, "Al margen de la noticia," would seem to suggest marginal, secondary, supplementary content and comment, adding something on to the main business of Comboni news on Africa. Yet in choosing this site as the platform for his valedictory, almost self-defining farewell, he seems to be pointing out, emphasising that in this magazine and the broad project it forms part of –straddling the borders of Europe and Africa so creating a space of dialogue between both– the marginal site of address of the African voice ultimately constitutes its touchstone, its defining core.

And, revealingly, much space of his send-off is dedicated to recalling the figure of Ndongo. After 41 years working on the magazine, González Calvo particularly highlights, Raoul Follereau, the apostle of the lepers; the founding father of the order, Saint Daniel Comboni; and Donato himself. Perhaps telling company. Of the founding father, Comboni, González Calvo recalls his opinion that "a África la salvarán los propios africanos," a defining belief that seemed to guide him in his determination to give Ndongo a platform from which to speak in a sustained and uncensored manner.⁷ As he indicates: "El fichaje de Donato no fue una casualidad. Partió de una convicción: dar la voz a los propios africanos."

Yet when we look at what that voice has to say we find that even though Ndongo seems to keep company with apostles and saints, and writes for a religious magazine, his vocational project as an intellectual points more in the direction of the anti-hagiographical, the iconoclastic and the secular. Edward Said, in his reflections on what the intellectual should be, warns us against excessive reverence of heroes, of apostles and saints, of, as he puts it, "gods

that always fail.” His model of secular intellectual is germane to the project of Ndongo. Said suggests:

Ideally the intellectual represents emancipation and enlightenment, but never as abstractions or as bloodless and distant gods to be served. The intellectual’s representations –what he or she represents and how those ideas are represented to an audience– are always tied to and ought to remain an organic part of an ongoing experience in society: of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless. These are equally concrete and ongoing; they cannot survive being transfigured and then frozen into creeds, religious declarations, professional methods. (84)

For the ongoing experience of society where better to look than to his most recent work, for example what Ndongo presented to his public in the form of his September '08 contribution to *Mundo Negro*, entitled “Preocupaciones.” Here we can see how Ndongo’s loyalty is not to the Church, to the institution that in effect pays him, but to “emancipation and enlightenment,” as Said put it, in whatever specific form and context these values might be made manifest with a view to enacting progressive change and contesting tyranny and conservatism designed to bolster exploitative cliques and cadres of power. For example, in dealing with the ongoing debate in Equatorial Guinea with regards to the appointment of a new bishop to the diocese of Ebebiyín, Ndongo reflects on the Church’s current, troubled relationship to power as well as highlighting its role in providing a degree of enlightenment during the country’s darkest days:

Las autoridades políticas, junto a la mayor parte del clero nativo, no verían con buenos ojos a un obispo extranjero en Guinea. Y surge la dificultad cuando se barajan los candidatos posibles. Se sabe que algunos serían vetados por el Gobierno, por ser curas contestatarios forzados al exilio; pero resulta arduo encontrar un sacerdote dentro del país que reúna las necesarias cualidades de idoneidad. El clero guineano sufrió particularmente los embates de la tiranía de Francisco Macías, el primer presidente de Guinea Ecuatorial tras su independencia de España en 1968, y durante aquel decenio ominoso fue una luz que brillaba al final del túnel. Se cerraron iglesias y seminarios, y la dictadura impidió toda actividad religiosa, sobre todo a los misioneros claretianos, evangelizadores de nuestros territorios durante la colonización.

However, elsewhere Ndongo has emphasised the essential role of the Catholic Church in the process of acculturation which was a key manifestation and expressly designed tenet of the exploitative Spanish colony's power in the Guinean territories. For example, in *España en Guinea: Construcción del desencuentro: 1778-1968*, he asserts that colonialism serves to “desmembrar” traditional society and goes on to quote from the former governor, Ángel Barrera, in an explicit denunciation of how a colonial policy with the Church in its vanguard promoted the mimicry of colonial culture and produced the colonial subject through a discourse of Christian enlightenment and progress that destroyed the indigenous culture, fixing the native into a position of servitude where he voluntarily identified with a power whose interests were manifestly opposed to his own:

El 28 de mayo de 1907, el gobernador Barrera dictaba las primeras “instrucciones por las que habrán de regirse los jefes de tribus y jefes de pueblos sometidos a nuestra soberanía y que en lo sucesivo lo verifiquen”, ya que “las razas que en estado primitivo pueblan estos territorios” debían ir “modificando sus hábitos, usos y costumbres, adaptándose y asimilándose a las nuestras, que han de tratar de imitar en su contacto con nosotros”, aunque eso sí, “sin violencias ni transiciones bruscas”. Dicho decreto tenía como finalidad, además, “determinar las relaciones y deberes que han de tener con las autoridades las tribus sometidas cuyos personales están constituidos en núcleos de población”, así como “sentar los primeros jalones para que la nueva generación entre de lleno en el ambiente de la moral cristiana y por ende en el camino de la civilización y del trabajo, enorgulleciéndose de haber nacido a la sombra de la gloriosa bandera de nuestra querida Patria España”. (153)

So it is abundantly clear that Ndongo's loyalty is, again quoting Said, to “emancipation and enlightenment, but never as abstractions or as bloodless and distant gods to be served,” and not to the Church as institution *per se*. Just as the Church is tainted by its association with colonial exploitation so too are the Enlightenment values of civilisation and progress that have been used to fix the colonised into a position of disadvantage and relative primitivism. Nonetheless, for Ndongo the flawed history of the Church and indeed of

Enlightenment doesn't disallow him from strategically and self-consciously recognising the emancipatory potential of Enlightenment ideas, or of the Church and the platforms of public expression it provides in specific times and places. Hence, both in his "Preocupaciones" piece and in his work generally, he is concerned to draw a broad, nuanced picture of the historical role of the Church in his society. But then having presented this complex historical reality he goes on to reflect:

Causa profunda tristeza decirlo, pero lo que predomina en nuestros presbíteros no es el esfuerzo por ser luz y guía del pueblo cristiano sino la ambición y el escándalo, igual que en la sociedad civil.

Guinea es un país poco poblado, donde nada pasa desapercibido, en el cual los sacerdotes están en el escaparate, sin que puedan evitarlo. Y todos conocemos a ministros consagrados que son más padres de familia que padres espirituales, que viven claramente amancebados, que recurren a las prácticas esotéricas tradicionales para alcanzar favores y prebendas, son tribalistas o están al servicio del poder constituido en detrimento de su misión doctrinal. Sin mencionar las estériles y sempiternas luchas intestinas entre religiosos y seculares. Acciones muy poco edificantes para el común de los fieles.

Said points out that if "you serve a god uncritically then all the devils are always on the other side" (88). In place of the binary trap where all meaning is collapsed irremediably into pure opposition, Ndongo posits a complex pattern of loyalties and a critical sensibility that will allow specific denunciation of abuse of power. Although his writing comes from an organisation within the Catholic Church he is in no way compromised in his ability to intervene publicly and to address established powers. His critique of specific instances of abuse of Church power is not softened or adapted as a result of his participation in a Church magazine. One could ask "what side is he on?" but the truth is he is, as his column title suggests, "al margen," neither completely in nor out. Said says:

Real intellectual analysis forbids calling one side innocent, the other evil. Indeed the notion of a side is, where cultures are at issue, highly problematic, since most cultures aren't watertight little packages, all homogenous, and all either good or evil. But if your eye is on your patron, you cannot think as an intellectual, but only

as a disciple or acolyte. In the back of your mind there is the thought that you must please, and not displease. (89)

In spite of the fact that Ndongo has a professional affiliation to *Mundo Negro*, his participation is marked by an independence and a willingness to address any issue that he deems of relevance, whether this is to his patron's liking or not.

This same independence allows him engage critically with and bring to the public's attention a broad range of issues without the need to demonstrate he is a licensed intellectual, he doesn't have to belong to a particular institution or guild, and consequently of course doesn't have to answer to any such institution. Rather than displaying a loyalty to institutions of power he has consistently shown his allegiance is to the individual dissident and has promoted the figure of the intellectual that addresses power and denounces abuse of power. That he sees this as a key defining role is evident in the fact that he chose to inaugurate his second period of participation in *Mundo Negro* –from 1996 on⁸– with the signal piece, “Intelectuales frente al poder.”⁹ In what amounts almost to a mission statement he highlights specific cases of intellectuals who have suffered at the hands of African dictatorships, commenting: “Estos ejemplos se multiplican en cada país del continente con una lógica terrible. Y es que desde nuestras independencias, hace 35 años, las únicas voces que se oponen con fuerza a las dictaduras son el clero y los intelectuales con conciencia.” This is a matter of choice, the alternative of cosyng up to power, of giving an intellectual stamp of approval to the dictatorial regimes like that of Obiang in Equatorial Guinea has to be denounced. As he writes “la precisión es importante, ya que hay otros muchos que, por avaricia o por cobardía, han puesto su arte y su capacidad de raciocinio al servicio de la insensibilidad, y ejercen de ideólogos de la barbarie.”¹⁰ Theirs is a misplaced loyalty; for Ndongo, like Said, the true role of the intellectual must be to resist the facile taking of sides, and avoid looking over one's shoulder for the approval of the patron. And if, as we have pointed out, he often praises the important role of the Church and its often enlightened clerics he does draw a parallel between the unthinking loyalty of the zealot and the demand for loyalty of the dictator,

revealing both to be the poisoned chalice of the colonial inheritance, the binary trap, the taking sides denounced by Said. Instead he offers the corrective of dissent and denunciation:

El hecho es que a los dinosaurios africanos les molesta la discrepancia. Lo único que aprendieron del Evangelio es aquello de “el que no está conmigo, está contra mí”, y así exigen lealtades absolutas, sumisión total, adhesiones inquebrantables. El intelectual, rebelde por su propia naturaleza y por exigencias de la ética y de la honestidad, no suele plegarse al boato palaciego.

In consonance with his physical condition as an exile, Ndongó's in-between intellectual status defies totalised, hermetic and Manichean rubrics of belonging, allowing him express loyalties not to the ruling clique but to the people of Equatorial Guinea, Africa, the African diaspora and the whole of humanity. In defence of these we find the constant insistence on values of “libertad, y desarrollo, y democracia” applied as correctives to the abuse of power, his monthly articles forming a chronicle of his sustained fight for these values.

And from this position of relative independence, from his liminal location straddling the borders of Europe and Africa there are above all two exemplary issues that have exercised him since his earliest contribution to *Mundo Negro*. These are what he calls the “explotación del negro por el negro,” in the form of the kleptocratic states of Africa, in particular his own, Equatorial Guinea, and the “explotación del negro por el blanco,” in the form of the neo-colonial exploitation of the natural resources of the African continent by Europe and North America. In articles such as that which immediately followed “Intelectuales frente al poder,” “El eterno candidato” –a single example from the multitude published over the last decade– he very convincingly denounces the Obiang regime and its supporters, the “acólitos” and “bufones de la satrapía que reina en Malabo,” which exploits the country's massive resources of oil and gas while schools and hospitals remain in the most inadequate of states, cities are barely supplied with electricity or water, justice is virtually non-existent and torture commonplace.¹¹ But after the manner of Said he insists on the need to

see the reality as one of “common history,” a complicated dynamic in which western regimes conspire to prop up the kleptocratic native cliques with a view to ready access to cheap natural resources.¹²

But all is not negative. This exploitative traffic of raw materials and the political imbroglio it sustains may be checked and challenged by the traffic of ideas and information, by the public participation of the intellectual and civil society. At the beginning of this paper I pointed out that Ndongo has highlighted how from an early stage francophone Africans were given a voice in Europe which permitted the development of Negritude and the creation of a space for the debate of issues relating to Africa, and recently he has also identified a similar dynamic emerging particularly from contemporary France. In a number of articles on the 2007 French elections he came to reflect on a perceptible change, on how “una buena parte de la opinión pública gala está empezando a avergonzarse del papel de su país en sus ex colonias, y preferirían un distanciamiento explícito y real de las satrapías instaladas en África” (2007a). And this he says is the hope we have to grab on to, but actively so. To reconfigure the relationship between the West and Africa away from neo-colonialism and kleptocratic regimes, Africans must take the lead in involving western civil society, precisely what can be achieved through the dissemination of a magazine like *Mundo Negro*, through public debate and even through the broad-ranging and non-elitist forums of academic engagement with African themes which are increasingly prevalent. Hopefully, in the consistent presentation of the facts of the neo-colonial and kleptocratic shame, in the traffic of ideas from Africa to Europe change may come about.¹³ As Ndongo points out, that, to a great degree, was what brought about the end of slavery. In a recent participation in the *El País* newspaper he energetically denounced the tragic role of Mugabe in Zimbabwe but suggested change could come about:

Si se produjese una complicidad entre africanos y occidentales, si los demócratas europeos y americanos se aunaran contra las dictaduras inhumanas de África, las cosas empezarían a cambiar. Nuestras independencias deben ser plenas, no nominales; pero, a tenor de lo vivido en el último medio siglo de relaciones entre

Occidente y África, sería preferible que la injerencia extranjera en nuestros asuntos se produjera a favor de los pueblos y no de los tiranosaurios. (2008^a:2)

In Spain the dominant note is still one of overwhelming ignorance about Equatorial Guinea but perhaps gradually less so than in the past. In the last year *El País* –the country’s biggest-selling national newspaper– also published a scathing critique from Ndongo, “En el aniversario del golpe de Obiang,” as well as a front-page Sunday supplement denunciation –uncompromisingly entitled “En tierras del tirano: La dictadura de las tinieblas.” This, along with the unsurprising curiosity that has arisen from the rumours that former Prime Minister Aznar was involved in the notorious 2004 attempted military coup against Obiang,¹⁴ tentatively suggest a timid awakening of interest in and resistance to the Guinean regime and its shameful accommodation by a Spanish government with one eye on Obiang’s oil and gas.¹⁵ Ndongo himself is not unduly sanguine and remains essentially pragmatic about the degree and pace of change, however, his magnificent, sustained performance as a public intellectual for over 35 years also owes a lot to a near unflinching optimism that lasting change can in fact be achieved, the quotidian horror of his homeland notwithstanding. And it is perhaps fitting that he should thus decide to conclude his participation in *Mundo Negro* for the year 2008 in celebration of that watershed of change for all things African, proclaiming that “a pesar de todo,” “Sí se puede.”

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¹ “I Congreso de Estudios Poscoloniales,” held at the University of Vigo, Spain, in November 1998. Ndongo’s contribution to the conference was subsequently published as “Guinea Ecuatorial: literatura a pesar de todo” in the volume of essays *Identidades Multiculturais*.

² In 2000 he subsequently co-published a second anthology, *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial (Antología)* with Mbaré Ngom.

³ Amongst the academic forums in Spain which have recently given protagonism to African Studies with an emphasis on Equatorial Guinea have been the series of “Jornadas de Estudios Africanos” which have been organised on a biannual basis at the University of León, Spain, by Marta Sofía López Rodríguez since the year 2000, the most recent held in October 2008 at which a version of this paper was read. The International Conference “De Guinea Ecuatorial a las literaturas hispanoafricanas,” coordinated by Landry-Wilfrid Miampika, was also held in November 2008 at the Cervantes Institute in Madrid with the motive of celebrating 40 years of Equatorial Guinean independence.

⁴ Famously, Sartre was criticised by Michel Foucault for playing the role of the “universal intellectual,” of speaking for oppressed others but through doing so ultimately cementing a hierarchy of power that had the white, metropolitan, middle-class, heterosexual male at its centre.

⁵ Good contemporary accounts of the Macías horrors are provided by Ndongo himself in *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* and by Suzanne Cronjé in *Equatorial Guinea-the Forgotten Dictatorship*.

⁶ Ndongo’s first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* represents very effectively the paternalistic but ruthlessly determined attempts by the Church to evangelise Equatorial Guinea’s native populations. Particularly in the early Franco period, Spanish colonial discourse was couched in a language of crusades, missions and spiritual colonisation with the ultimate goal the salvation of “el alma infantil del negro.”

⁷ In the discussion that followed my presentation of a version of this paper at the aforementioned conference in León, Spain, Ndongo himself was very keen to insist that at no stage throughout his long years of participation with *Mundo Negro* has even the slightest degree of influence on the content of his articles been brought to bear by the editorial team.

⁸ Between the years 1975 and 1989 Ndongo was an occasional contributor to *Mundo Negro* and after a six year absence he returned in ‘96 with a monthly column which he soon gave the title “Al margen de la noticia.”

⁹ See also “Intelectuales y poder,” where he denounces that the persecution, jailing and murder of African intellectuals is a commonplace.

¹⁰ In personal conversation with the author, Ndongo has revealed that on a number of occasions he has been contacted by Obiang himself with a view to offering him a ministerial post in his government, evidently in exchange for his silence.

¹¹ Occasionally the horrors of Equatorial Guinea are dismissed as mere anti-government propaganda but international observers consistently bear out the claims of Ndongo and other critics. As recently as November 19, 2008 the UN Special Rapporteur on torture stated that following a 10 day visit to the country he had found: “that torture is systematically used by the police forces against persons who refuse to “cooperate” – political prisoners as well as suspects of common crimes, in particular at the Central Police Stations in Bata and Malabo [...] Types of

abuse reported to me, and corroborated by expert medical analysis and evidence found in the respective police stations, include: beatings on various parts of the body, but often on the soles of the feet and/or the buttocks with police batons, solid “rubberized” cables and wooden bars; electric shocks with starter cables attached to different parts of the body with alligator clips; various forms of suspension with hands and feet tied together, including the so-called “Ethiopian style” for prolonged periods. In these positions the victims are swung, beaten, or heavy devices such as car batteries are placed on top of their backs. Furthermore, they were sometimes blindfolded or forced to inhale candle smoke.” He went on to conclude that “The context that allows torture to continue unabatedly is characterized by the non-functioning of the administration of justice and, therefore, the absence of the rule of law. Factors contributing to this situation are: The absence of an independent judiciary; Endemic corruption; Arbitrary detention is common and habeas corpus is completely ineffective in practice.”

¹² A good indication of the unnatural relationship that exists between the West and Equatorial Guinea is the total lack of a significant trading relationship with neighbouring countries. A 2008 report from the International Monetary Fund reveals that between the years 2001 and 2005 the USA received approximately 30% of all exports; over the same period Spain’s share fell from 34.4% to 10.8% and of the other 9 countries that take up almost all remaining trade (in 2003 trade to countries other than those mentioned came to a miserly 2.2%) 5 are European, the others being Canada, Japan, China and Brazil. Imports follow a similar pattern with Côte d’Ivoire the only significant African trading partner.

¹³ In the abovementioned UN report the Special Rapporteur, while stressing the widespread torture and virtual inexistence of a code of justice, does state “I would first like to stress that I appreciate that the Government of Equatorial Guinea has invited me to undertake a fact-finding mission to the country. I interpret this invitation as a sign of the willingness of the Government of Equatorial Guinea to open itself up to independent and objective scrutiny of the situation of torture and ill-treatment –practices to which no country in the world is immune.” This would appear to suggest that the publication of a comparative universal framework which exposes a deficit of basic human rights in places such as Equatorial Guinea in tandem with the constant, sustained denunciation from intellectuals such as Ndongo can bring about change.

¹⁴ The military coup was allegedly led by the former British SAS old Etonian, Simon Mann, with numerous well-known figures in the background such as José María Aznar, Mark Thatcher (son of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher) and Severo Moto, head of the self-styled “Gobierno de Guinea Ecuatorial en el exilio” of which Ndongo figures as nominal “ministro de Asuntos Exteriores.” Moto last year spent four months in a Spanish jail for arms-trafficking and Mann is currently serving a 34 year term in Malabo’s infamous Black Beach Prison for his role in the coup. Ndongo points out in “Mártires,” a *Mundo Negro* piece that he hasn’t met Moto since 2005 and has only maintained a number of brief, tense telephone conversations with him in which he requested his name be removed from the aforementioned “Government in exile.”

¹⁵ The scale of oil production in Equatorial Guinea is often the subject of wildly differing speculation but in the most recent evaluation provided by the official U.S government web site, Energy Information Administration (EIA) on January 16, 2009, the figure established for daily oil production was 368, 529 barrels per day, down from a peak of 396,000 barrels per day in 2005. Also, in its report on Equatorial Guinea, the EIA website reports “According to the World Bank, oil revenues increased in value from \$3 million in 1993 to \$190 million in 2000 to \$3.3 billion in 2006.” The CIA World Factbook reports the current population at 616,458 with a Gross Domestic Product per capita (PPP: Purchasing Power Parity) of \$28,200 (In the same survey Spain’s PPP is given as \$33,600); yet Amnesty International’s 2008 report states that “In August the authorities acknowledged that 60 per cent of the population lived in abject poverty and that only 33 per cent had access to clean water and electricity, despite economic growth over the previous year of 21.5 per cent, one of the fastest in the world.” Is this latter recognition once again an index that influence being brought to bear from external pressure groups and vocal critics is beginning to have an effect on the ruling elite?