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**African Hispanic literature: Identity and National Discourse**

In this presentation I propose to explore some thoughts and ideas about the African dimension of Hispanidad, or comunidad hispánica, as some would prefer to call it. I will examine the sub-Saharan dimension of Hispanidad, to be more specific, and how this concept intersects and interacts with the articulation of cultural and/or national identity in African literature of Spanish expression. The specific object of this paper is the literary creation of Equatorial Guinea, the only sub-Saharan country with a literature written in Spanish, a cultural project that has received very little critical and theoretical attention in Africa, in Europe, as well as in America. In Spain, former colonial power, this absence is also evident in universities and secondary schools= curricula.

The concept of Hispanidad, beyond its hegemonic connotation, has been described as the community of Spanish speaking countries (and peoples) around the globe. According to this broad definition, Hispanidad would include countries and population of Europe, Spain and Andorra, Hispanic America and North America, including Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, and parts of Asia, in this case, I am thinking of the Philippines where there are still pockets of Spanish-speaking groups. Africa is also due consideration, for it includes two Spanish-speaking entities, Equatorial Guinea and The Sahraoui

Democratic Republic. Equato-Guinean scholar and writer Trinidad

Morgades Besari (1987) defines it as follows:

La Hispanidad es un sentimiento; diría más es una filosofía, una vía de futuro, un quehacer común a todos los hispanohablantes. Es una herencia inagotable a la que siempre habremos de recurrir cuando nos falta el aliento espiritual para seguir hacia adelante, a pesar de los avatares de esta vida. Y si consideramos que el mundo en que vivimos hoy, tiene una necesidad vital de integrarse en grandes unidades políticas, económicas y culturales, porque la unión hace la fuerza, nosotros, los guineanos y el resto del mundo de la Hispanidad, comprenderemos por qué hemos de recurrir a la Hispanidad en busca de valores que nos lleven a una acción común, a fin de conseguir realizaciones prácticas y esperanzadoras para un mundo futuro mejor planificado y organizado (40)

Along the same lines, Guinean journalist, historian, and author

Donato Ndong-Bidyogo (1986), points out that,

La Hispanidad de ahora mismo no es una propuesta de vuelta a las brumas de nuestra niñez, tiempo en que fuimos los apéndices de aquel Imperio otoñal de selvas tropicales y montañas nevadas. La Hispanidad de ahora mismo es un engranaje a través del cual los países y pueblos de esta estirpe común potenciaremos nuestros valores específicos en el mundo, nos ayudaremos mutuamente a salir de las dificultades particulares y nos sabremos siempre unidos a través de la lengua, de la cultura y de ciertos valores humanísticos, sin que ninguno pueda sentirse desamparado por orfandad(3).

Both visions transcend the oppressive and colonialist connotations of the past, as well as simple cultural affinity, and aim for stronger ties at political, economic, and cultural levels. Unlike organizations like *La Francophonie* (new version), for the former French and Belgian colonies, and *The*

Commonwealth, for the former British colonies, Hispanidad is not an institutional organization, rather it draws upon Spanish language as a linguistic and cultural unifier. In their attempt to write and/or define national identity, most Guinean scholars draw upon the Hispanic aspect of their historical heritage, or Spanishness, as Igor Cusack(1999) calls it, which plays a central and bridging role in the articulation of the discourse of identity. In his opening speech at the *I Congreso Internacional Hispánico Africano de Cultura* held in Bata in June 1984, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema stated that,

Guinea Ecuatorial es fundamentalmente consecuencia de dos grandes polos culturales, el *africano* y el *hispanico*, de entre los que se yergue nuestro protagonismo de país, y entre ambos se comprometen necesariamente a la búsqueda de *nuestra identidad nacional* (*Mundo Negro: 25*);

Along the same line of thought, Trinidad Morgades Besari argues:

En Guinea Ecuatorial conviven fundamentalmente dos culturas: una de entronque *bantu* y otra enraizada en la *hispanidad*. El humanismo guineano se nutre del ensamblamiento de estas dos culturas; en ellas está su fuerza y su futuro esperanzador. Los valores hispánicos y africanos confluyen para formar el nuevo hombre guineano (*Africa 2000, 1987: 39*);

And Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo(1986) corroborates:

Guinea es un país a la vez *hispanico* y *africano*, y en esa identidad simbiótica radica su originalidad, su esencia y la garantía de su autonomía. Al fundirse los

valores de la cultura adquirida, los hispánicos, con los valores de la cultura heredada, los bantúes -pues todos los pueblos que componen nuestro Estado pertenecen a la cultura bantú, lo cual no conviene que se olvide-, se operó en el espíritu del guineano una transformación importante, y a nuestro juicio (pues son esas, y no otras, nuestras señas de identidad, que se ha ido estructurando en una nueva cosmogonía (...)). ...Hay guineanos que escriben, que pintan, que esculpen; que trabajan, en definitiva, desde su perspectiva hispanoafriicana, para dotar a su país de ese dinamismo sin el cual el progreso sería imposible(3);

Hispanic heritage is part of various materials called upon by Guineans and others in the articulation of national cultural identity. In addition, unlike other African countries, Senegal with Wolof, RCA with Sango, Mali with Bambara, where there is native *lingua franca* that enable members of different ethnic groups to communicate, in Equatorial Guinea, Spanish is the main vehicle of interethnic communication<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>. John Lipski (1992) writes that, A En todas partes del país, las lenguas autóctonas predominan en las comunicaciones intraétnicas y a veces aun al tratar con otros grupos africanos, y el idioma español se reserva para comunicaciones interétnicas y para tratar con extranjeros(31)=

The republic of Equatorial Guinea is located in the Gulf of Guinea, or Biafra, as the case may be, between Gabon, Cameroon, and Nigeria. It is the only sub-Saharan country with a hispanic heritage, and therefore a literature written in Spanish, or as Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo puts it, "es la única expresión española en el Africa negra". Again, I insist on this sub-Saharan dimension because Spain had other colonies, or was administering other territories in North Africa, such as Ifni, Saguiet El Hamra better known as Western Sahara which is under Moroccan occupation. And that's part of what makes this cultural creation different and original, for while the French, English, and Portuguese languages are shared by many African countries, Spanish is only spoken in Equatorial Guinea. This distinctiveness is a combination of two elements. First and foremost is its Bantu heritage, i.e., its Negro African dimension, and second, as I stated earlier, it is the only country south of the Sahara desert to use Spanish as its official language, but also as a vehicle of transethnic and transnational cultural expression and transaction.

Consequently, Guinean literature, like other African literary expressions written in transcontinental languages 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, Bantu, i.e., Ndowe, Fang, and Bubi to mention but a few, characterized by the more flexible and pragmatic rules of orality. Fernando Lambert describes this as "Cultural anthropophagy", i.e., a phenomenon of "friction des textes" marked by a process through which the African text ended up incorporating the European text. In light of the above, I will describe this cultural experience as "literatura hispano-negroafricana" [Hispanic Negro-African Literature]. In describing this cultural project as (Negro)African, within the context of African literary production, my intention is, on one hand, to

distinguish it from North African hispanism, or what is left of it, and on the other hand, to differentiate it, to a certain extent, from the Afro-Hispanic cultural experience whose area of production is Latin America, including the Caribbean.

In Spanish Guinea[La Guinea Española], intellectual life and cultural activities were limited to the island of Fernando Póo, and to be more specific, to the city of Santa Isabel today called Malabo. The only publication of the time was *La Guinea Española*, published by the missionaries of the Inmaculada Corazón de María at the Seminary of Banapá. *La Guinea Española*, whose first issue appeared in 1903, featured a wide range of articles on the evangelization, life in the colony, and on agricultural productivity. It also had sections such as *APágina literaria* and *ADe nuestra biblioteca africanista* mostly devoted to religious literature. But first and foremost, the journal, as the motto under the name read, was *Adefensor y promotor de los intereses de la colonia*. Therefore, it was a platform for the dissemination of Spain's colonial ideology in that part of Africa.

In its January 10, 1944 issue, *La Guinea Española* organized a literary contest and invited what it described as "Plumas coloniales"[Colonial pens] to send submissions:

Con el presente número, organizamos un concurso artístico literario que, pensamos proseguir en años sucesivos para estimular las muchas plumas coloniales que con prestigio y decoro pueden figurar al lado de otras firmas metropolitanas y que , no dudamos han de contribuir a divulgar y exponer aspectos y temas

coloniales desconocidos o parcialmente enfocados (número 1165).

Needless to say, there were no natives among those "plumas coloniales". Three years later, in 1947, *La Guinea Española* inaugurated a new section, "Historias y Cuentos", limited to Guineans:

"Esta nueva sección que hoy comenzamos, un exponente del pensamiento de nuestros indígenas recogido tradicionalmente en cuentos, historias, narraciones, refranes y cantos, contribuyendo de esta suerte a *perpetuarlos y a divulgarlos*. Además de nuestra labor personal y la colaboración de los misioneros, confiamos en los alumnos del Seminario, maestros, colegiales de la misión, de la Escuela Superior Indígena y catequistas de nuestras reducciones que nos enviarán el mayor número posible de "historias" sobre cualquier tema" (número 1236).

This invitation was restricted to a specific group of people: students of the missions and seminaries, and teachers, i.e., individuals who evolved in a controlled and alienated space that placed them in a situation of exile in their own homeland. Aedín Ní Loingsigh (2001) writes to that effect,

L=entrée dans le monde de l'éducation coloniale constitue une véritable initiation à la différence culturelle et raciale, et elle représente un facteur de rupture important dans la mise en exil progressive du colonisé (3).

Further, this male-oriented initiative excluded and marginalized women, a policy that would have a detrimental effect on the emergence of a female body of literature in Spanish in Equatorial Guinea. Though the response to the invitation was massive, those



early "works" were, in fact, mere transcriptions and translations into Spanish of the oral literary corpus of the different ethnic groups of the colony including the Fang, the Ndowe, or the Bubi to mention a few. Moreover, all the texts were identified by their ethnic origin, such as "historieta pamue", "leyenda bubi", or "cuento ndowe" playing into the colonial strategy of what Frank Ukadike calls "Afragmentation of identities". But this gave way to a double process. On one hand, the "intermediaries" stopped transcribing and translating, and started manipulating the traditional texts; on the other hand, the interaction at the textual level (collection, transcription, and translation) resulted in the incorporation of some aspects of the European literary experience into the African text which gave birth to a new cultural product that could be described as hybrid discursive practice. Though the "new" texts still relied heavily on oral tradition, they nevertheless acquired a more autonomous form as Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (1984) observes:

"(...) Bien pronto, obtuvieron conciencia de la importancia de su misión, y poco a poco, de modo apenas perceptible, fueron transformando la pura transcripción, la traducción en formas de creación autónomas, si bien aún ligadas íntimamente a las fuentes originales" (22).

However, I wish to point out that the act of translating from a source text to a target text is, in itself, an act of textual

manipulation, therefore this process was not just limited to the thematic level. In resorting to the traditional literary corpus of their respective ethnic groups for inspiration, the first generation of Guinean writers were pursuing a double objective. First, they intended to articulate their cultural identity through varied discursive practices and, by the same token, reclaim what Paulin Hountondji calls their "Certificate of Humanity". Those early texts (novels or short stories), were characterized by strong ethnographic content with repetitive descriptions of customs, rituals, traditions, and legends. Congolese critic Wilfrid Miampika describes this early literary practice as "A literatura posible", for though still marked by fragmentation, i.e., the expression of different ethnic and cultural identities, it paved the way for what would be later called "Literatura guineana". Second, in developing a distinct cultural practice, those authors sought to obliterate the subaltern and marginal structures where Spanish colonial discourse had installed them. In so doing, they generated what Filipino critic Priscelina Patajo-Legasto calls "alternative objects of knowledge" about themselves, their history, and their culture. This writing project is evident in the early works of Rafael María Nze's *La gallina y la perdiz* (1950), Constantino Ochá's *Biom y los hombres rudos*, Esteban Bualo Bokamba's *Kon, el Blanco* (1961) y *Le va toco Buwe* (Al fin vimos la luz)

(1962), Jose Esono's *El topé del leopardo*, Francisco Obiang's *Meyen, Meyene*, and Marcelo Asistencia Ndong Mba's *Mientras la tumba brama en su selvática canción* (1962) to mention but a few.

In 1953, Leoncio Evita Enoy published what was considered to be the first novel in Guinean literature: Quando los combes luchaban (Novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española). The novel was, as Evita himself puts it, Auna novela etnológica de las costumbres de la tribu combé en cuyo medio se desarrolla la acción novelesca en el país del Muni de una época precolonial (33). Evita insists on and focuses on a specific group: the combes ethnic group of Continental Guinea, which is a clear indication that cultural identity is central to the argument of the novel and to his project.

Published in Madrid by the Instituto de Estudios Africanos of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, the novel was used as a powerful instrument of propaganda to show the positive results of the civilizing mission of Spain in sub-Saharan Africa. Since the colonial space was authoritarian, unidimensional, monolithic, and a repressive environment by nature, Evita was very aware that he needed to make his discourse understandable and acceptable to the dominant order. This writing strategy misled censors and Carlos González Echeagaray the author of the prologue:

No deja de ser curioso el hecho de que la novela está pensada y sentida en blanco, y solo cuando la acción

se desarrolla entre indígenas, solamente, en parte, y como un espectador, el escritor se siente de su raza (Prologue).

Many years later, Evita would comment that, "La situación colonial que prevalecía cuando escribí mi novela, me dió un gran estímulo para seguir escribiendo y ampliar mis conocimientos. Personalmente, sentí gran satisfacción por abrir aquella pequeña brecha en el "dique" del monopolio de la discriminación intelectual"<sup>1</sup>. Ciriaco Bokesa Napo (1996) describes this period as "Ala época del temor al blanco cuando escribir suponía alabarle y quasi marginar cuando ridiculizar lo autóctono. Otras veces, se escoge lo nativo como noticia macabra para la metrópoli (104)". This intellectual discrimination is evident in the preface to the Spanish edition of René Maran's *Batouala. Véritable roman nègre* (1921), the first novel published by a black writer on colonial Africa in Africa. José Mas Laglera, translator and author of the prologue, wrote:

Ala novela no sólo era de negros, sino que estaba escrita por un individuo perteneciente a esta raza. El caso me pareció insólito. Yo no podía concebir que un negro del Congo tuviese aptitudes de escritor. Sabía que, educándoles en Europa, llegaban a ser buenos bailarines y que algunos hasta habían llegado a tocar la trompeta y el violín con verdadero arte; pero de esto a describir paisajes y estados de almas, había mucha distancia (...). René Maran tiene de negro más que el color de la piel" (Prologue).

José Mas Laglera would be echoed thirty years later, in 1953, by Carlos González Echegaray, another africanist. In the prologue to

Leoncio Evita's *Cuando los combes luchaban*, González Echegaray

writes:

"Cuando Leoncio Evita me dió a leer su novela y me pidió que le hiciera un prólogo, no le di mi palabra de escribírselo hasta que no me convenciera de que se trataba de algo distinto de los relatos inconexos y absurdos que algunos "morenos" seudointelectuales escriben(...). Pero mi sorpresa fue en aumento a medida que iba leyendo, al encontrarme con una *obrita* francamente aceptable, y que bien pudiera haber sido escrita por cualquier *escritor novel* nacido en nuestra patria." (Prologue)

These derogatory comments on Marañón's as well as Evita's books were at the core of European colonial ideology. They are a good illustration of what Kwame A. Appiah (1992) called *Extrinsic racism* (12-13), and an important component of European discourse, Spanish in this case, of de-structuration of the Guinean space and socio-cultural systems.

Nearly a decade later, in 1962, Daniel Jones Mathama published *Una lanza por el boabi*. As an *Africanist*, Jones was incorporated to the center and as such, he not only fervently celebrates the colonial situation, but is strongly critical of his own people. Jones Mathama's novel integrates, along with Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonte* (1926) and Amadou Dugay Clédor Ndiaye's *La bataille de Guilé* (1912), to mention a few, what has been called literature of consent.

Between 1963 and 1968, during the heyday of the nationalist struggle for independence in Spanish Guinea, journals like *La Guinea Española*, *Poto-Poto*, and *Bantú* were still featuring essays

by Guineans. It is during this period that a new literary genre appeared on the cultural scene: poetry. The writing of identity, national and Panafrican, plays a central role in the new literary project. Guinea and Africa are the major themes of these poets as evidenced by Juan Chema Mijero's *El león de Africa* (1964), Francisco Zamora Segorbe's *Lamento sobre Annobón, belleza y soledad* (1967), and Ciriaco Bokesa's *Isle verde* (1968). It is an idealized and possible vision of Africa and Guinea that is reflected in these texts.

Unlike African literature in French and English, African Hispanic literature has followed a different path in its genesis and further development. First, it was late to arrive to the African literary scene; second, in colonial Guinea, literature did not develop side by side with the nationalist movement for freedom from colonial rule like in the former French colonies. Besides, neither the Négritude nor the African Personality movements had the same echo and impact that they had in other parts of the continent because of the isolation of the Spanish colony. Linguistically, Guinea is in a predominantly francophone area, and geopolitically, Spain's policy of containment, along with tight censorship, did the rest. Translations of texts by other African authors or intellectuals were not allowed in the colony. Consequently, Guinean intellectuals missed two major cultural events closely associated with the nationalist movement

for freedom such as the Premier Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs held at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1956, and second in Rome in 1959. At the present stage of my research, my conclusion (at least temporarily) is that there was not an anti-colonialist literature, i.e., a committed literature in the sense it was defined by Léopold Sédar Senghor at the Congress of Negro Writers at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1956 ("La littérature africaine est une littérature engagée"). Guinean journalist and writer Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (1984) corroborates my provisional conclusion:

" Los escritores guineanos, como el resto de los africanos, están poseídos por su realidad circundante, aunque en la primera etapa casi se apuntaba en una sola dirección, y, en rigor, no se puede hablar de una literatura anticolonialista en Guinea Ecuatorial(...). por más que en algunas obras se describa algún exceso.

A few years later, when Guinean intellectuals came in direct and open contact with the remnants of the Négritude movement, some of them, like Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, expressed their apprehension because they felt Négritude no longer addressed issues relevant to the new post-independent African reality. In his poem *Cántico* (1984), Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo writes:

Yo quiero ser poeta  
para cantar a Africa  
Yo no quiero ser poeta  
para glosar lo negro  
Yo no quiero ser poeta así. (92)

Donato Ndongo would further distance himself from Négritude:

(...) sencillamente no había en el alma del guineano

esa necesidad de un resurgimiento cultural al modo de la explosión de la Négritude, que se pondría los cimientos del nacionalismo cultural y político en el Africa subsahariana. (30)

On October 12, 1968, nearly ten years after most sub-Saharan countries, Equatorial Guinea gained its freedom from Spain. Independence and the ensuing establishment of new institutional structures stimulated the emergence of a new political and cultural discourse described as National Project in some countries. The African post-independent reality also became the site for the emergence of national literatures and of what has been described as post-colonial discourses. These were projects that, to some extent, sought to be unique and distinct as the first step towards the articulation of a specific national identity. But Writing a national identity (as Igor Cusack (1999) puts it) is an oversimplification in so far as different individuals and groups within a given territory may perceive what constitutes their national identity in different ways or varying emphases (207). In the case of Equatorial Guinea and many African nations the multiethnic composition of the population warranted that the formation of national identity be closely associated with a territory bounded by fixed international borders and recognised and upheld by the international community (Cusack 207-8). Territory then became one of the defining factors and the primary site for the construction(s) of national identity. But



territorial space, given the artificiality of the borders inherited from the former colonial powers, which, in most cases, do not correspond to social, ethnic, and political reality of that environment, made the articulation of this project even more problematic. Territorial boundaries, in this context, became a construct, a defining platform that some African nations relied upon to build national identity. Cusack writes, "The official national identity therefore emerges as a collage or assemblage constructed out of different materials" (208).

Senegalese critic Mohamadou Kane (1985) notes:

L'état né de l'indépendance n'est pas [Fang], il n'est pas gouverné selon les traditions [Fang]. C'est une mosaïque de peuples, de cultures. Il se réfère à une multiplicité d'identités qui ne sont pas forcément conciliables (22).

Equatorial Guinea was no exception to this rule. Equatorial Guinea is inhabited by several ethnic groups, including the Fang, the Ndowe, also known as Combe, the Benga, Baseke, Balengue, Annobones, Bujeba, the Fang of Rio Muni being the largest one. Nation building as well as the formation of national identity could not rely on one single ethnic group to the detriment of others, but rather on the construction of national unity through shared historical experiences within the boundaries of a common

territory. But this project would go astray as soon as the territory became independent. Five months after his election, President Francisco Macías Nguema denounced a coup attempt, declared a state of emergency, suspended the constitution, abolished political and social debate by banning all political parties, instituted a one-party rule, self-appointed himself Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and proclaimed himself President for life. Macías embraced the post-independent African discourse authenticity of the time, known as African Authenticity, that Swiss historian Max Liniger-Goumaz described as *afro-fascism*. He called the Guinean version *Nguemismo*. As a supposedly nationalist project, the African discourse of authenticity stood as a critique and an alternative to European cultural and political hegemony. But it was manipulated and deviated from its original goal and took a demagogic course. In some countries it became the instrument of neo-colonialism, or turned into dictatorship in others. Eventually it only benefitted the ruling minority, ethnic or military, and failed to achieve political and economic independence. In this sense, it disrupted and altered the articulation of an inclusive national project. In Equatorial Guinea the colonial force was replaced with a new ethnic-based and exploitative force. Instead of liberation after decolonization, there was a replication, in national terms, of the old colonial system of oppression and

structures. President Francisco Macías Nguema ruled brutally supported by the Fang-Esangui group from his home province of Mongomo, also known as the Clan of Mongomo. Throughout his presidency (1969-1979), Macías dealt brutally with opponents who were not members of his clan. As a post-independent nationalist discourse, Nguemismo was manipulated and instrumentalized as a mobilizing force that symbolized "national unity" against re-colonization and neo-colonialism. It sought legitimation and national unity through violent practices and total control of the public and economic spaces. In so doing, the regime intended to render the rest of the social actors invisible by stripping them of their political culture, and by establishing what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o calls the "Culture of Silence and Fear".

The borders of the country were closed, freedom of movement of the citizenry restricted, and Guinea became *Auna gran jaula* [a big cage], i.e., a huge concentration camp. This is how the narrator in El párroco de Niefang (1996) by Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, describes that space:

Salir con una barca a alta mar era considerado por el régimen de Macías como un acto de subversión que atentaba contra la seguridad del Estado. Por eso se mandó destruir todas las embarcaciones desde Mbonda hasta Río Campo y desde Cuche hasta Corisco. Nada podía navegar. Se prohibía a toda la población del litoral el acceso a su propio espacio marítimo (37).

On the other hand, the nguemist discourse engaged in the task of rewriting the country's National History, traditional and

contemporary in order to achieve national unity<sup>2</sup>. The regime falsified contemporary history:

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<sup>2</sup>. Macías Nguema declared himself:  
- Gran Maestro de educación, ciencia, cultura de la república de Guinea Ecuatorial; Único líder y héroe nacional; Padre de la revolución y fundador del estado guineano; Responsable supremo de los destinos históricos de nuestra nación; Primer nombre sagrado y revolucionario de Guinea Ecuatorial; Padre de todos los niños revolucionarios. In addition, everyday and everywhere in Equatorial Guinea, be it at work, at school or at church, everybody had to sing: "Dios creó a Guinea Ecuatorial gracias a Macías, y sin Macías no hay Guinea".

Macías hablaba de luchas y de victorias. Macías decía que el tam-tam de los negros había sonado en la selva tropical para tomar el poder a los blancos. Macías se fue a la OUA y ganó. Macías se fue a la ONU y ganó. Macías hizo un viaje relámpago a Madrid, se peleó con Franco en El Pardo y ganó<sup>3</sup>;

as well as traditional history:

Yo soy la luz de la vida, vuestro cristo victorioso, el poder me viene de los ancestros y por eso yo he sido elegido Presidente de la República. Solo contra todos expulsé a todos los españoles del territorio nacional y ahora soy y señor de Guinea, pero también de vuestras vidas<sup>4</sup>.

Throughout the rule of Macías there was an official ban on books, except for laudatory pamphlets supporting the regime. National and foreign press were prohibited, and private correspondence was examined. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (1990) describes that period as *Años del silencio*, for he notes:

(...) no hubo ninguna manifestación literaria dentro de Guinea Ecuatorial, por la sencilla razón de que se perseguía a todo el mundo, fundamentalmente a aquellos que pudiéramos llamar intelectuales, y el simple hecho de hablar español era castigado con la cárcel. No digamos escribir: muchos guineanos murieron porque en cualquier registro domiciliario se les encontró apuntes en español... De modo que las únicas manifestaciones

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<sup>3</sup>. Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng. *Huellas bajo tierra*. Malabo: CCHG, 2000: 18.

<sup>4</sup>. Mbomio, *op. cit.*, 49.

literarias de Guinea Ecuatorial durante aquel período se produjeron en el exilio"<sup>5</sup>;

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<sup>5</sup>. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo. Letter to M=Bare N=Gom from Malabo, Equatorial Guinea dated on October 22, 1990.

Exile and silence became part of the post-independent Guinean reality<sup>6</sup>. In the meantime, thousands of kilometers away in Spain, the discourse of resistance began to take shape. But it was a semi-clandestine and marginal discursive practice. To make matters worse, on January 30, 1971, the Spanish government declared Equatorial Guinea "Materia reservada", a total blackout was imposed on all news about Equatorial Guinea. Organized opposition to Macías regime was either restricted or prohibited in some cases. This regulation was in effect until August 14, 1974. Produced in these precarious conditions, the discourse of the Guinean diaspora was disseminated through an underground and marginal circuit. Though it failed to reach a large Spanish readership, marginality was nevertheless instrumentalized into a site of resistance and became the stepping stone for the articulation of a discourse of national identity that transcended ethnic division and differences. Produced from the territorial discontinuity of exile, i.e., beyond the fixed and recognized borders of the country, the literature of the diaspora was, from diverse discursive practices and form of expressions, the first attempt to condense and reflect on national unity and identity. The anonymous poem *El cinco de marzo* appeared in El Molifugue informa (7 septembre 1977), a bulletin published by one of the several

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<sup>6</sup>. It is estimated that one third of the population of the country, i.e., 120,000 people, fled during the presidency of Macías creating one of the largest diaspora in early post-independent Africa.

organizations of the Guinean diaspora. The poem commemorates the violent appropriation of the Guinean reality by the nguemismo:

Cual primer llanto al nacer  
las primeras lágrimas por mi tierra  
EL CINCO DE MARZO

Las primeras muertes injustas,  
el aborto de mi alegría,  
EL CINCO DE MARZO

El desprecio por mi pueblo  
y un dictador sanguinario  
los crímenes y horrores,  
EL CINCO DE MARZO

Los huérfanos de una patria  
murió la ley y la justicia  
el hombre perdió valor,  
EL CINCO DE MARZO<sup>7</sup>.

The strategic use of words such as *Apatría*, *Ahuérfanos* [orphan from the same parent], *Apueblo*, *tierra* denotes a desire to obliterate ethnic divisions and tensions, i.e., heterogeneity, for it is seen here as a common experience of dislocation and suffering.

The discourse of the diaspora revolved around two main

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<sup>7</sup> MOLIFUGE signifie, Movimiento de Libertad y Futuro de Guinea Ecuatorial. Son organe de diffusion était le mensuel *El Molifuge Informa*



themes: nostalgia that some of these writers described as Aorfandad de tierra@[homeland orphanage], and the traumatic experience of displacement and violence. The theme of Aorfandad de tierra@ is expressed through abundant and nostalgic evocation of Equatorial Guinea that appears under the light of a remote and prohibited space. Most of the poems idealize it through vivid descriptions of its vegetation, beaches, rivers, and climate, i.e., a geographical space that displaced Guineans could easily identify. This can be found in Juan Balboa Boneke=s *Nostalgia Rebolana* (1987):

Con la seca y la lluviosa,  
con la fresca brisa matutina  
Quiero viajar  
para bañarme en tus raíces  
y llenar de amor y hermandad tu entorno  
Rebola (29).

Pedro Cristino Bueriberi Bokesa=s *Nostalgia de mi tierra*(1984) :

Tierra mía, tierra mía!  
Qué lejos estás de mí!  
Mis ojos, suaves, anhelan  
fieles tu verde verdí(55).

The quest for identity is also a quest for unity in order to overcome ethnic tension as well as territorial, cultural, and socio-economic dislocation . In *)Dónde estás Guinea?*(1982), Juan Balboa writes:

(Oh! Guinea errante,  
Guinea del exilio: )dónde estás?  
(Y qué haces para a tu madre salvar?  
Lloras tu soledad y orfandad,  
impasible y sordo  
de espaldas vives al llanto y dolor  
de aquélla que el ser te dio,  
aislados hermanos a hermanos  
buscas su Libertad,  
Pero juntos, (oh! Guinea errante  
qué haces para a tu madre salvar.

The second thematic area of the cultural project of the diaspora focused on the denunciation the violent and traumatic

nature of *nguemismo* which engaged in a process of systematic degradation and destruction of the Guinean body. In *Epitafio*(1984), one of his rare poems, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo(1984) writes:

Un tiro certero...  
Ya nada,  
Nada más  
Que un cadáver  
Muerto. Tierra  
Fue un hombre(92).

And Anacleto Oló Mibuy=s *A un joven fusilado en Santa Isabel*(1984):

Voy con esta luz de rimas  
dejando flores estériles  
en las burbujas de sangre,  
y poniendo, piadoso  
en cada carne de tu cuerpo destrozado  
las letras muertas de tu libertad(116).

In some instances, this discourse called for the use of violence and elimination of the tyrant as in Francisco Zamora=s *Vamos a matar al tirano* (1984) :

Madre:  
Dáme esa vieja lanza  
Que usó el padre  
Y el padre del padre  
Tráeme mi arco nuevo  
Y el carcaj repleto de flechas  
Que parto a matar al tirano

Mira mis ojos  
Observa mi descripción  
Pertenezco a un pueblo de revueltas  
Observa mi hechura  
de escaramuzas y levantamientos  
Mi pulso no temblará(130);

and aggressive resistance and rebellion as in Anacleto Oló Mibuy=s *La voz de los oprimidos*(1984) :

Mis poesías serán leídas un día

debajo de mis árboles,  
sin techos ni barnices de aire.

Muertos y vivos de corazón arañado  
de cualquier negra injusticia,  
mis poesías llamarán a la resurrección  
con la voz de los que no la tuvieron  
con la voz de los oprimidos(118).

Violence is also suggested as a means to overcome differences, obstacles, and the tension created by the clash between Guinea, as an emerging nation-state, and what French journalist Gilbert Wasserman calls Aethnocracy. But the use of violence as a form of resistance is also seen as the first step towards the achievement of peace, reconciliation, and national unity. So when Anacleto Oló Mibuy writes:

Padre:  
Ha muerto un guineano más  
No importa sexo, tribu,  
circunstancias, lugar.  
  
Ha muerto. Guineano,  
hermano, paisano  
que se apaga en un día,  
-y como todos-  
con la marea del exilio;  
con la soga de la nostalgia(34);

he is reaching out to the Guinean diaspora which, regardless of its ethnic group, seeks to build a sense of national unity as a result of what Cusack calls A shared memories of terror, i.e., a common experience of shared oppression, dislocation, and pain that conjured for a vision dominated by a sense of national identity and unity. Displacement and adversity here favor solidarity between individuals from different ethnic groups.

Cusack observes that Ait may be that mobility, crossing borders, is a common feature in the emergence of certain ethnic and national identities (213). Donato Ndongo (1992) writes that,

El exilio, el hecho de formar parte de una comunidad de negros que vivían en una sociedad blanca nos ha caracterizado (sin querer entrar en la polémica del racismo en España), y nos ha permitido tomar conciencia de nuestra propia identidad (52).

This Abonding in adversity can be found in the collective initiative that led to the publication of the rare texts in prose fiction that appeared in the 1970s: Nueva narrativa guineana (1977), a collection of four short stories, and the poetic anthology Poetas guineanos en el exilio, published, according to Donato Ndongo, Acon el fin de recaudar fondos para uno de los movimientos políticos de resistencia antimacista. Two important non-literary texts were also published during that period: Donato Ndongo Bidyogo's Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial (1977) and Juan Balboa Boneke's Donde estás Guinea (1978). The concept of AGuineanidad is very explicit in the titles. Along with the above mentioned anthologies, these works represent the first and legitimate attempt to represent Guinea as a multiethnic nation with no loyalty to any specific ethnic group, i.e., an entity with an Aofficial national identity. Donato Ndongo's Historia..., for example, is the first attempt to write a history of Equatorial Guinea from the Guinean perspective, and the same applies to the book-length essays of Juan Balboa and Eugenio

Ncogo=s La condición humana published a few years later.

On August 3, 1979, Francisco Macías regime was overthrown by a military coup known as Ael Golpe de Libertad@ led by his own nephew, Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema. It was a time of hope. Juan Balboa Boneke celebrated what was thought would be the dawn of a new era with a poem entitled *Tres de agosto 1979* (1987):

Y florecieron las sonrisas,  
y la brisa de esperanza  
que refrescó los hogares  
camino de un futuro  
triumfal aún por imaginar(49)

During the 1980s while Alos espíritus se estaban serenando@, as Donato Ndongo-Bidyoyo then put it, Equatorial Guinea engaged in a process of reconstruction and redefinition of what was then described as a viable and inclusive national project. On June 6, 1982, during an award ceremony for national and international artists and intellectuals held at Estadio de la Paz in Malabo, the President, Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema stated:

La cultura debe ser considerada en mi Gobierno como prioridad absoluta, ya que sin ella el pueblo de Guinea Ecuatorial no podría asumir positivamente el proceso de la Reconstrucción y Reconciliación Nacional.

Reconciliation and nation-building were among the top priorities of the second republic. Whether it was a coincidence, there was what could be described as a cultural renaissance. It was a double process that took place in two different and distant locations: Equatorial Guinea and Spain. In Spain, the death of

General Franco and the ensuing democratic process benefitted the Guinean diaspora, for there was more freedom of movement and expression. It is within that more permissive environment in the early 1980s that the first writings of the Guinean diaspora began to appear openly. One such text was Raquel Ilonbé's Leyendas guineanas (1981), traditional stories from different Guinean ethnic groups collected by the author throughout Equatorial Guinea in search of her roots as she put it. The publication of Leyendas guineanas seemed to augur a very promising future not only in the field of children's literature in Equatorial Guinea, but also in the recovery of oral tradition, but that has not been the case. Juan Balboa Boneke's collection of poetry O' Boriba (El exiliado) (1982) and Susurros y Pensamientos comentados: Desde mi vidriera (1983) reflect the traumatic experience of exile. In 1984, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published Antología de la literatura guineana, the first comprehensive attempt to establish a literary canon. In 1985, Ekomo, by María Nsue Angüe was published by the Ediciones de la UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) in Madrid. Ekomo is the first novel by a female writer in Guinean literature. The novel gives a fresh, genuine, profound, and different perspective on the condition of women among the Fang ethnic group. It is also the first attempt to give alternative images and representations of Fang women by a Fang woman. In 1987, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published Las tinieblas de

tu memoria negra, the first part of a trilogy whose second release, Los poderes de la tempestad appeared in 1997. While in Las tinieblas Donato Ndongo explores the colonial situation through the innocent eyes of a child growing up in an alienated space and torn between two cultures, in Los poderes... he examines the presidency of Francisco Macías Nguema marked by abuse, violence and death. Donato Ndongo's literary project, as the author has stated on more than one occasion, is marked by the search for identity, for he writes,

cultivo, desde distintos géneros literarios, un sólo tema: la búsqueda de las señas de identidad del guineano. Creo que necesitamos saber quiénes somos y por qué somos como somos. A esa investigación he consagrado mi vida des mi adolescencia y creo que hasta mi muerte(1997:42).

And more recently, titles such as Justo Bolekia Boleka's Löbëla (Madrid, 1999), Francisco Zamora's Memorias de laberintos (Madrid, 1999) in poetry, and José Siale Djangany's Cenizas de Kalabó y Termes (Avila, 2000), Maximiliano Ncogo's Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos[2nd edition](Avila, 2000), and Juan Tomás Avila Laurel's La Carga (Valencia, 2000), are a good illustration of the vitality of the Spanish cycle of this cultural renaissance.

The second process was centered in the Centro Cultural

Hispano-Guineano in Malabo<sup>8</sup>. Founded in 1982, the mission of the Centro Cultural was A la activación de la vida cultural, artística, folklórica, educativa de nuestro país@, i.e., to promote and disseminate Guinean and hispanic culture in Equatorial Guinea and abroad. In addition to establishing an editing and publishing arm, Ediciones del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano, the Centro Cultural also houses the largest library of the country, and publishes two journals: *Africa 2000* and *El Patio*. Ediciones del Centro Cultural established several publication series called Acolección@ in order to accommodate the different intellectual interests that were emerging in the wake of its ever growing activities. These include Acolección Poesía@ which has released several anthologies and poetry books; Acolección Ensayos@ which is more diverse because it covers different disciplines; Acolección Literatura popular@, Acolección Relatos@, and finally, Acolección Narrativa@, the largest. In all, Ediciones del Centro Cultural have released more than forty titles through the different series or Acolecciones@ since its foundation.

*Africa 2000* and *El Patio*, the two publications of the Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano, have acquainted the Guinean public with national writers whose works appeared while they were in

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<sup>8</sup>. On July 9, 2001 the Centro Cultural Español was inaugurated in Bata, Continental Guinea.



exile, and have also served as a launching pad for young and novice writers from the mid-1980s onward.

During a short period in the 1980s, the government of Teodoro Obiang tried to control the production of cultural discourse by creating the shortlived ediciones Guinea which edited a few books before closing. In the 1990s, Equato-Guinean literature kept growing despite setbacks in the political and economic life of the country. Some authors started exploring new and alternative discursive platforms, such as drama/theater. Though there are very few writers who have ventured into this field, those who have soon realized that it is an effective means to explore the Guinean post-independence because of its long reaching capacity. Trinidad Morgades Besari's *Antígona*, Juan-Tomás Avila Laurel's *Los hombres domésticos*, and Pancracio Etogo Mitogo's *El hombre y la costumbre* are part of this burgeoning literary trend. Closely related to the former is the emergence of a new generation of writers. Most of them were children during the years of Anguementismo, but unlike the previous generation, they started their literary career in Equatorial Guinea. They are member of what poet Anacleto Oló Mibuy describes as *Anueva narrativa nacional* or *Anuevo costumbrismo nacional* in prose. Besides using a new writing style, their focus is the immediate reality of the post-independence with its contradictions made of repression, lack of freedom, hardships, broken promises,

corruption, and a country immersed in a deep economic crisis, and resurgence of ethnicity as a major player in the political arena. This difficult and precarious economic, political, and cultural environment drove the few Guinean intellectuals and professionals like poet Juan Balboa Boneke and Donato Ndong-Bidyogo back into exile, compromising the project of national unity of the Second Republic, and thus fragmenting the country again.

The process of nation building and the articulation of a sense of national identity is still in the making in Equatorial Guinea due to the social, political, and economic circumstances of the country since its independence. During that period, literary discourse appears to be, through direct or implicit allusions, one of the leading platforms in the articulation and development of national identity. This identity narrated by literary discourse, in conjunction with other cultural practices, is marked by deterritorialization and dislocation on one hand, and by cultural ethnic heterogeneity, on the other. It is diverse and open to influences, but also marked by tension in some cases.

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