

Abstract

This thesis examines how the postcolonial narratives of Equatorial Guinea express resistance at the social level. Three postcolonial texts, namely *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) emit various discourses of resistance. These works, which rehash the Spanish colonial legacy, are also concerned with the social degeneration brought on by the first postcolonial presidency, often referred to as *Nguemism*. In response to these events, the writings of these authors show a refusal to be absorbed by both the colonial rhetoric and nguemist ideologies. Through their exploration of the nation's history, religion and its ethnic and class issues, these texts unearth and denounce hegemonic conceptualizations of their identity which results in a pursuit of freedom from these powers.

This study uses a postcolonial theoretical approach to discuss articulations of resistance. In postcolonial theory, resistance signifies any opposition to, or any acts intended to subvert authority. This thesis discusses how these novels challenge institutions — both colonial and post-independence — which continue to perpetuate political, social or cultural oppression in Equatorial Guinea. These novels contest institutionalized histories of the country, historically and postcolonially, and revise them using the collective experiences of the citizenry. They also construct diverse identities that defy homogenic perceptions emanating from colonial discourse and from *Nguemism*. This dissertation shows that articulations of resistance within the post-independence narrative of Equatorial Guinea are not monolithic, but diverse and engage with the various challenges the nation faces currently. Together, this corpus of texts articulates the desire to rethink and reformulate the ideological parameters that continue to be sources of oppression for the national community.

Keywords

Equatorial Guinea, Resistance, hispanicization, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Nguemism, revising history, Nguema, Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, religious hybridity, Subverting colonial discourse, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, *Arde el monte de noche*, Inscribing African orality, Annobón,

Summary for Lay Audience

What is resistance, and how do the postcolonial novels of Equatorial Guinea articulate this? Resistance signifies any act of opposition meant to shirk off the power that dominant forces and systems wield over individuals or groups. This thesis examines how three post-colonial narratives of Equatorial Guinea published between 1996 and 2009 speak out against colonial and post-independence forces that continue to adversely influence individual and national life after independence. Contemporary Equatorial Guinea has been marked by Spanish colonialism from the turn of the twentieth century until 1968, and also by the post-independence dictatorship of Macías Nguema which ended in 1979. The effects of both tenures of oppression which left adverse and indelible traits on its peoples continue to operate. As such, these novels, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), *El párroco de Niefang* (1996), and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) challenge the powers of the colonial administration and the first independence government.

In speaking out against the ways in which Spanish colonialism and the independence government continue to exercise their power over them, these texts oppose colonial authority as well as the power of the nation-state. The first novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad* describes the atmosphere created by the first postcolonial presidency. It looks at how this government uses history to maintain its dominance, and how the writer revises this history to reclaim this power. It also looks at what resistance means for people who were extremely exploited under Spanish colonialism and how they express their opposition to it. In the second novel, *El párroco de Niefang*, the narrator also engages in revising how Guinean people have been represented within colonial documents. It also looks at how the first postcolonial presidency, also referred to as *Nguemism* violated the human rights of many Guineans. In the final novel,

Arde el monte de noche, this novel uses African storytelling techniques to inscribe Annobonese language and culture within a Spanish text. This deviation from the standard European writing norms attempts to push the limits of the imperial language to make room for African cultural concepts, thoughts and speech patterns.

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INTRODUCTION

Although the postcolonial narrative of Equatorial Guinea continues to gain attention among literary critics and scholars, it remains relatively understudied within the field of Hispanic literary studies. This could be attributed to the tendency to map Spanish colonialism onto the geographies of Latin America and the Philippines (Chira 1). In addition to its small size, Equatorial Guinea's visibility has been conditioned by Spanish colonial control and the censorship of the country's independence government. Consequently, its literature has developed in two distinct geographical locations, Equatorial Guinea and Spain. Altogether, the works that make up contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature are characterized as a confluence of African culture and Hispanic heritage (Cusack 78). Most of the scholarship on its literature has highlighted the complex nature of the country's identity. Even though this search for identity implicates a sense of resistance, this concept has received less attention in the study of the postcolonial narrative of Equatorial Guinea.

This thesis focuses on three Equatorial Guinean postcolonial novels written in Spanish. They are *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) by Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, *El párocco de Niefang* (1996) by Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel. These novels reimagine the nation under the country's first president, Macías Nguema. Although Nguema is never directly present in these texts, the plots of these novels revolve around his dictatorship, and they reveal the social and political degeneration the national community fell into under his leadership. Secondly, these novels demonstrate the close links between the Spanish colonialism that preceded the nation's independence and the socio-political struggles its citizens face.

This dissertation identifies how each novel broaches the question of resistance, and the discourses they employ to represent this position. Through a systematic analysis of each text, this thesis attempts to establish that each book addresses a specific aspect of resistance pertinent to the project of decolonization. It will discuss the strategies the characters within these novels use to defy the ideologies of the Nguema regime and to challenge the colonial legacy. The underlying argument is that Nguema's anti-colonial nationalism, which simply inverted the imperialist social hierarchy, merely reinforced the former colonial systems of oppression. As such, these texts move beyond a purely oppositional model of resistance to embrace a more transformative discourse that recognizes the country's social and cultural diversity. Even though the focus of the discussion remains on the strategies of resistance, the thesis will signal equally significant intersections of this discourse with gender, ethnicity, class, religion, hybridity and identity.

Post- Independence Literature

The socio-political developments of the post- independence years have echoed in the writings of Guinean authors, novelists and poets. During his tenure as president, Macías Nguema's persecution of intellectuals drove many of them into exile. Coupled with the complex intersection of censorships operating in Equatorial Guinea and Spain, this negatively impacted the literary output of its scholars and intellectuals. Furthermore, Spain's external ban also diminished the few existing possibilities for Guineans living there to draw attention to the destruction of their country. The end of the Nguema regime in 1979 and the lifting of the ban by Spain in 1977 brought with it a revival of literature and cultural activities which significantly marked the Guinean literature. From 1990 onwards, the establishment of two

cultural Centers in Malabo and Bata gave new impetus to the literary publications of a new group of writers who grew up under the dictatorship.

The three novels selected for this thesis, namely *El párroco de Niefang* (1996), *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) were all published between 1990 and 2010. This period has been referred to by Spanish critic Ramón Trujillo as “los años de la esperanza” (882). The novels that emerged within this time tackle the challenges their country continues to face as a result of colonialism and Nguemism. Globally, articulate the collective experiences of the post-independence years that have been silenced or erased from national conceptualizations of history. Through various discourses, they write against this erasure and resist the dominant forces which continue to exert its powers at the individual, national and even discursive levels.

Postcolonialism and Resistance

The aftermath of colonialism and its legacies are often cited thematically within many postcolonial African novels mainly because it continues to produce tensions within the nation. As scholars of postcolonialism argue, the prefix ‘post’ does not imply a complete disassociation from the history of colonialism but instead highlights the contemporary challenges that have their roots in the colonial experience (Hulme 120). In this, Ania Loomba reiterates that it is more helpful to perceive postcolonialism not just as coming immediately after the demise of colonialism, but as the contestation of the legacies that it left behind (16). This analysis is crucial to the question of challenging colonial legacies because formal independence and decolonization did not do away entirely with the unbalanced relations of power between the former metropole and the colony but ushered in neo-colonial relations and

practices, most of which are still operative. Such a position enables the reader of postcolonial literature to read resistance and to situate its different manifestations as a subjective continuation of the formal project of decolonization.

Resistance forms the bedrock of the critical project of postcolonialism. In various ways, the project of Postcolonialism itself is a project of resistance, an intellectual position that questions and problematizes the colonial experience within the postnational context. Sanjay Seth defines Postcolonialism as “a set of questions and a style of thought which are made possible by colonialism and its aftermath, and which seek to rethink, and redescribe, its own enabling conditions” (Seth 214). For critics such as Leela Gandhi, postcolonialism, in its “postnational guise” is concerned with “a non-violent reading of the colonial past through an emphasis on the mutual transformation of coloniser and colonised, and... a blueprint for a utopian inter-civilizational alliance against institutionalised suffering” (140). However, even with the implicit notion of resistance underlying these analytical approaches towards questions of colonialism and its aftermath, Jefferess concludes that with the sporadic attention that the concept of resistance received within postcolonial studies in the 80s, resistance remains undertheorized. Ashcroft also adds that the notion of resistance is often the least discussed because critics often ignore the ways in which colonized communities appropriated instruments of their domination to assert their identity (21). In this regard, the capacity of these communities to imbibe the dominant culture without being absorbed by it and to appropriate its discourse of modernity as a signifier of postcolonial identity constitutes a kind of non- violent resistance.

The amplitude of the concept facilitates its use as an umbrella term that describes various forms of contestation. Thus, “resistance is a word which adapts itself to a great variety

of circumstances, and few words show a greater tendency towards cliché and empty rhetoric” (Ashcroft 20). Furthermore, historian Frederick Cooper also agrees that the concept can be “expanded so broadly that it denies any other kind of life to the people doing the resisting... and may narrow our understanding of African history rather than expand it” (1532). However, the analysis of the expressions of resistance presented in this thesis will examine the contexts within which these discourses of resistance are emitted. Specifically, it looks to do a closer reading that acknowledges the intersectionality of resistance with the historical, the cultural and the political. In this way, my discussion attempts to reflect the diverse articulations of resistance within these novels. My discussions try to show that resistance is not unidimensional, but complex and sometimes even contradictory.

Postcolonial thinkers such as Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Benita Parry and the Subaltern Studies collective have conceptualized resistance by interrogating the discursive and the material conditions which inform the colonial subjects’ resistance to colonialism. In the post-independence context, as Leila Ghandi highlights, resistance turns to engage with the structures which reinforce the discursive and political structures of colonial power. For some of the earliest theorists such as Fanon, resistance is construed in terms of anti-colonialist opposition. This is a model that replicates the violence inherent within the establishment of the colonial settlement itself. Critics have remarked that even though Fanon provides a useful tool for the new nation and its decolonization, he fails to delineate resistance as merely the violent replacement of the colonizer with the colonized. Jefferess argues that regardless of Fanon’s ambivalence, “his work is particularly significant for the way in which the cultural and political, discursive and material elements of colonial power, the activists, guerrillas,

politicians, peasants and cultural producers, are all integrated in his discussion of colonialism and its opposition” (9).

The postcolonial novels of Equatorial Guinea also consider the interconnectedness of colonialism to resistance and the ways in which structural transformation is inseparable from cultural transformation. This seems to be the fundamental argument of Donato Ndongo-Biyogo’s novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*. This text is a critical mouthpiece against the oppositional model of anti-imperialist resistance. It poignantly depicts the detrimental consequences of an anti-imperialist discourse that looked to the past instead of the future. So, what then constitutes effective resistance? To what extent does the oppositional model that the Nguema regime adopted alter or reinforce the discursive and political structures of colonial power? Does the protagonist’s resistance lie in their ability to challenge state-sanctioned ideologies? Or does it lie in their commitment to their ideals of equality and decolonization for all Guineans? Depending on their geographical location and social position, how does each narrator react to the colonial legacy? How does their approach to resistance differ from each other? What functions do these narratives perform given this History of Equatorial Guinea? These are some of the questions that this dissertation will try to answer. To do so, I will be using Jefferess’ definition of resistance as that which “endeavours to transform the discursive and material structures of colonial power rather than simply subversion of or opposition to certain aspects of these structures” (7). I will also extend the analyses of resistance to the structures of the post-independence nation-state.

Chapter Divisions

This dissertation is structured around seven chapters. In this first, I provide the historical background to the nation of Equatorial Guinea. In this section, I highlight important historical events that have shaped the development of this nation's identity in order to identify the strands of Nguemism and colonial ideology that these authors write against. The second chapter outlines the literary trajectory of Equatorial Guinea from colonialism to contemporary times. It highlights the themes, style and works of notable works from Equatorial Guinea. This chapter then turn to discuss salient topics within the scholarly research on the postcolonial novels of Equatorial Guinea and to highlight common themes within this genre and how they relate to the question of resistance.

The third chapter consists of a literature review of the theoretical contributions to the concept of resistance within postcolonial studies. I examine the models of resistance proposed by leading postcolonial theorists and explore perspectives of resistance with the aim of liberation and decolonization. I also look at transformation as a kind of resistance that embraces hybridity. This discussion of resistance also implicates the question of the language that individuals and groups use to communicate their stance. In line with this, I examine the use of the Spanish language within Equatorial Guinean literature and how Guinean authors perceive the Spanish language as a medium of creative expression.

In the fourth chapter, I analyze Donato Bidyogo-Ndongo's novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997). As one of the few texts in which the characters come face to face with the agents of the regime, this text links structural transformation with cultural transformation. It reveals how flag independence failed to translate into true freedom for its peoples. In this

novel, I examine the representation of the apparatuses of state oppression and how the characters contest this state-imposed ideology. Specifically, I look at how the protagonist subverts the post-independence historical narrative by simultaneously interpolating and revising nguemist history. I also look at the notion of complicity with the dictatorship as a kind of resistance. This is best exemplified by the female character of the paramilitary officer Ada, who embodies the dictator. Ada's gender and her usurpation of the hypersexuality associated with dictators point to gendered violence within her community. Here, I analyze how her gender, sexuality and cooperation with the regime interact to display her resistance to patriarchal Fang norms surrounding female sexuality. Finally, I look at how the unnamed protagonist uses his identification as a culturally hybrid individual to counter the state-imposed ethnocentric identity.

The fifth chapter turns to *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) by Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng. This is a text which marks the transition from Nguema's government into the Obiang administration that followed. This novel represents a breaking away from state-imposed identity and poses critical questions about Guinean cultural identity. It is not surprising then that the vestiges of Spanish culture, represented through Catholicism, feature prominently within discussions about the search for personal and social identity. The central figure in this text, Father Gabriel, is a priest who goes through a crisis of faith after his release from prison. My analysis shows how the narrator politicizes a narrative about the religious experiences of the Niefang community and its environs in a two-fold expression of resistance. It relies on the present experiences of Father Gabriel to subvert Spanish colonial discourse on religion and education and points to its acculturating effects on the imperial subject. Also, this novel's depiction of a hybridized Christianity is a testament to the postcolonial identity crisis. Here, I

will dwell on the concept of hybridity as a response to a monolithic and homogenizing construction of Guineans within the colonial record. Bacheng revises this representation by demonstrating that while Guineans had adopted Catholicism, African cultures, values and philosophies still formed the bedrock of Guinean cultural identity. In the novel's second articulation of resistance, *El párroco de Niefang* shows a resistance to forgetting the physical and psychological abuse that Nguemism brought onto nation and historicizes these experiences that the current regime has erased or silenced.

In the sixth chapter, I will discuss *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel. I analyze this writer's strategy of subverting the colonial discourse on language. Situated in an isolated island within the Atlantic Ocean, this narrative calls upon the reader's attention with its lack of chronology and explicit details. In this novel, the question of the writer's abrogation and appropriation of the Spanish language in non-conventional ways reformulate the novel as an oral tale. In Ávila Laurel's novel, he attempts to indigenize the text by bringing in his native Annobonese oral storytelling techniques and simulating its speech patterns into Spanish. The narrator also incorporates into the text local words which require an active engagement with the text to fully decode. While these textual strategies, which deviate from the metropolitan standard are not carried out with the same frequency as is observed in the works of other sub-Saharan authors like Chinua Achebe or Gabriel Okara, the compendium of these textual strategies pushes the limitations of the Spanish language to inscribe African thought, speech patterns and philosophies within a Spanish text.

In the conclusion, *Los poderes de la tempestad* and *El párroco de Niefang* transmit the sense of an unfilled promise of independence. They go beyond their role as witnesses of the brutalities of the dictatorship to demand true freedom and decolonization using the

language of resistance. Their authors consider the state of religion, politics and the colonial legacy and advocate for liberation and transformation as the basis of true independence for their communities. *Arde el monte de noche* enunciates this same need, but from a linguistic standpoint. Its inscription of Annobonese culture echoes the insufficiency of the imperial language in fully capturing indigenous thought and shines the light back on the question of how Equatorial Guinean writers express the nation's diverse identities textually.

1 CHAPTER 1: SPAIN IN WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA

Within Hispanic literature of the twenty-first century, the literary production of Equatorial Guinea is relatively unknown. The country's size and historical trajectory have all contributed to its obscurity, both on the African continent and within the global Hispanic context. As the only country south of the Sahara whose official language is Spanish, Equatorial Guinea possesses a unique identity and language not shared by her neighbours. This small nation simultaneously straddles indigenous African and Spanish colonial heritage, and she shares in the problems of many postcolonial nations.

Contemporary postcolonial literature continues to revisit the historical events that created the country we now know as Equatorial Guinea. The prevalence of the colonial past highlights the enduring cultural links between former colony and metropolis. Secondly, the post-independence government and its imposition of Nguemism features predominantly in the literary production of this period. As a result, these novels respond to these historical events. Therefore, an analysis of the concepts of resistance that they express cannot be separated from the historical events that created them. Secondly, the resistance expressed by these authors cannot be fully grasped without an understanding of the power relations emanating from colonialism and from Nguemism. As such, this chapter will highlight elements of geographic, historical, social and cultural significance to the emergence of this Hispano-African nation.

1.1 Pre-Colonial Communities

Equatorial Guinea, like many African countries, is multi-ethnic and comprises diverse ethnic groups. Equatorial Guinea is divided among mainland and offshore islands. It comprises of the continental region of Río Muni, the islands of Bioko and Annobón and the

islets of Corisco, Elobey Chico and Elobey Grande. The largest part, Río Muni, is in the West-Central region of the African continent. It is a small rectangular enclave wedged between Gabon to the east and south and Cameroon to the north and is separated from the island region by hundreds of miles. The island of Bioko (formerly Fernando Po) is the largest offshore island while Annobón, Corisco and the Elobeyes, smaller islands in the Río Muni estuary, and have had varying importance in the history of the region.

The Fang people reside on the continental enclave of Río Muni. The Bubi inhabit the island of Bioko, while the other ethnic groups, the Combes, the Bujebas, the Balengues and the Bengas, referred to altogether as Ndowes or *playeros*, occupy the coastal parts of the Río Muni territory. Miles away from the Gulf of Guinea, within the Atlantic ocean, is the island of Annobón and it is home to the Annobonese.

Ethnological studies suggest that the Fang migrated from a region along the Nile to their present location in the west-central region. During their migration, they arrived in different groups, who settled in Gabon, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea (Nsue Mibui 59). The Fang group is made up of various tribes, and they share the belief of a consanguineous relationship between members of the same tribe. Fang towns were organized around tribes. Among this group, the tribe was seen as the extended family unit and it was forbidden to marry from within one's tribe as this was considered incest (Nsue Mibui 77). Communal proprietorship among the Fang was gender-specific, and daily chores were divided by sex. Hunting and fishing were reserved for men, while the women engaged in farming activities and domestic chores. They believed that death was only one stage of life and that the dead went to *Bekón*, a spiritual world of the dead (195). The Fang belief in the supernatural world of the dead enabled them to relate to this spiritual world through their ancestors and their

dead. Their common language, Fang, has different dialects with some dialects being mutually unintelligible.

The island of Bioko (formerly Fernando Po) is home to the Bubi people. The Bubi are one of the most isolated peoples of the Bantu group. The historian Ibrahim Sundiata estimates that a majority of the Bubi people occupied the island at least a millennium before the first European visit to Fernando Po. The origins of the Bubi are old and fragmented. Some oral traditions north of the island maintain that the population is autochthonous, and those in the south speak of a relatively recent arrival (9-15). According to Justo Bolekia Boleká, the existing oral tradition of this people points to pre-colonial activities such as hunting and fishing, with a local subsistence economy based on the cultivation of yams, and the production of palm oil. Bubi political authority centred around the king, known as *bötóku*, who was assisted by a council of elders. He notes that by the time of contact with Europeans, the Bubi had established a matrilineal monarchy. Among this group, labour was strictly divided by gender. Generally, the care of the home and the children went to the woman, and it was the man's duty was to provide for his family by fishing, hunting, or extracting palm oil (20).¹ Early mentions of the presence of the Bubi people by would- be sixteenth-century colonizers is fraught with their warnings about the climatic dangers and misconceptions about a supposed hostile population who inhabited the island. Sundiata explains that for the Bubi, avoiding strangers was undoubtedly conditioned by their experience of sporadic slaving expeditions (Sundiata 1996: 17). The first Europeans to venture into the islands along the Gulf of Guinea

¹ Justo Bolekia Boleká identifies five phases of Bubi civilization, dating back to the neo-lithic era when the first Bubis arrived on the island. He details the technological advancements that the first settlers attained, their significance in Bubi society and the decline of these arts post European contact (Boleka 15-21).

were the Portuguese. They claimed Bioko (Fernando Po) together with the Elobey, Corisco and Annobón islands as Portuguese territories. Due to the growing slave trade within the Bight of Biafra during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they set up trading enclaves and plantations in Fernando Po. In the three centuries which followed the Portuguese presence in the Bight, the Bubi and their island remained relatively forgotten despite the slave trade networks which the Europeans established within the Bight of Biafra.

Ndowé pre-colonial history is quite uncertain, and knowledge of their prehistorical origins are controversial. However, oral tradition among this group points to migration towards the west. Their language, Ndowé, comprises various dialect groups. Among the Ndowé, also known as the *playeros*, fishing and farming are the main economic activities, and women take part in both activities. For the Ndowé as well, the tribe is seen as the extended family unit and marriages were strictly exogamic. They practiced polygamy and the highest authority within the tribe was the chief of the tribe, the *Ipono ya mapandji*, who was aided by heads of families, the *Melo ma betungu*. However, the *Mosochi*, the paramount chief, could convene the *Ipono ya mapandji*.

1.2 European Arrival

In 1471, two decades before Columbus' voyage to the Americas, Portuguese sailors João de Santarem and Pablo de Escobar, in their search for an alternative sea route to the East had ventured off the coastal waters of the Gulf of Guinea and landed on an island in the middle of the Atlantic which they named Annobón and claimed for Portugal (Ndongo-Bidyogo 1977: 11). A year later, two Portuguese explorers Fernão do Poo and Lopes Gonçalves sighted what is now called Bioko island, and they called it Fernando Po. These and the neighbouring islands of Elobey and Corisco entered the cartographies of the Old World as Portuguese territories.

The island of Annobón's location, situated about six hundred and seventy kilometres from the island of Bioko, makes this the most isolated and farthest territory from the rest of the country. According to the earliest accounts, it was uninhabited at the time the first Portuguese arrived. It was named Annobón by Juan de Santarem and Pedro Escobar who sighted it on January 1, 1471. At the height of the slave trade in neighbouring São Tomé and Príncipe in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese brought a few of their sailors and Jewish converts to Catholicism to populate the island to control the slave trade within the Bight (Nsue-Mibui 313-18). Later, they brought Africans, mainly female slaves extracted from various communities in the Bight of Benin, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe (Bartens 729). As a result, it was inevitable that two distinct social groups would emerge on this island. On the one hand, the enslaved African population began to grow, and an amalgamation of diverse beliefs, African ethnicities and traditions evolved. On the other hand, the European class also influenced the culture, language and social values of Annobón.

Once desired for the quality of slaves it produced, Annobón lost its importance with the end of the slave trade and Portugal ceded this island to Spain in 1778 (Nsue-Mibui 313-8). Spanish attempts to colonize this island in the following years failed. It was not until 1834 when Spain laid claim to the island. Several missionary groups had tried to establish themselves on the island. However, it was the arrival of the Claretian missionaries in 1885 that marked the beginning of the island's Hispanicization (Bartens 732). Currently, in addition to the official language, Spanish, the Annobonese speak Fa d'Ambu, a Portuguese-lexified creole. Their main economic activities are fishing and farming, and the division of labour within this community is also gendered. They believed in the spirit *Liim*, and his veneration was directly responsible for a bountiful harvest or the wrath of nature.

With the “discovery” of America and the implementation of the plantation system, by the second half of the sixteenth century, these offshore islands proved advantageous for the Portuguese in the transfer of European merchandise and African slaves to the New World. The plantation system in Brazil and other parts of the New World increased the demand for African slaves. As the Portuguese began to dominate the slave trade along the Gulf of Guinea, they also discovered that the islands of Fernando Po, Cape Verde and São Tomé provided an ideal ground for planting sugar cane which was increasing in demand in Europe. In Fernando Po, they planted mainly sugarcane and for the next century, they relied on African slave labour from the neighbouring regions (Chira 2-8).

Although the Portuguese were the first to arrive within the Gulf of Guinea and to establish their presence mainly through the slave trade, the papal bull issued around 1477 granted Spain trading rights along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. As trading with the New World heightened capitalism within European metropolises, Spain and Portugal became commercial rivals. Their disagreements over the rights to trade along the Bight of Biafra culminated in the treaty of San Ildefonso in 1778, which ceded commercial rights to Spain in the Bight of Biafra between the Niger and Ogoue rivers. In return, the Portuguese traded their offshore islands to the Spanish for the withdrawal of Spanish claims within the Portuguese colonies of Brazil (Castro, De la Calle 20). However, Spain did not show any economic or political interest in these islands until the second half of the nineteenth century. Even Spanish missionary attempts to win over the Bubi from 1840 onwards failed.

The Spanish Crown retook possession of Fernando Po in 1836, and when Spain restored its monarchy in 1844, it rechristened its sub-Saharan colony “Los Territorios Españoles del Golfo de Guinea.” From the second part of the 1800s, the end of the slave trade

diminished the usefulness of these territories for Spain and between 1827 to 1836, Spain conceded its rights of use to the British who turned it into a base for anti-slave trade operations within the Biafra region (Chira 3). It would take another half century before Spain made any efforts at investing in its colonial settlements in sub-Saharan Africa. This renewed interest was fueled in part by the loss of its last colonies, Cuba and the Philippines in 1898, and the increasing profitability of cocoa on the world market (Sundiata 1996: 168).

British antislavery activities helped populate Fernando Po with former slaves from Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Nigeria and some freed slaves from Jamaica and Cuba. During this time, the natives of the island, the Bubi, remained mostly in the interior and did not often interact with these coastal settlers. The English built a port town, St. Clarence, which became a center of English culture and intense protestant evangelical and missionary activities. These settlements embraced British culture and European modes of dressing, architecture, language and religion became symbols of status. The presence of the British promoted the establishment of a Western class system. By the twentieth century, Fernando Po had a black Europeanized creole elite known as the *Fernandinos* who controlled the cocoa plantation economy. According to John Lipski, the presence of the English, layered with the presence of Nigerian migrant labour in Fernando Po assented the use of pidgin English on the island. The Spanish viewed the assimilation of English culture by the *Fernandinos* as threat to its cultural dominion and in 1858, the colonial administrated asked all the English settlers, including the Methodist missionaries to leave the island (Sundiata 1990: 14-7).

1.3 Spanish Conquest and Colonization

From the 1880s, with the abolition of the slave trade, and the growth of industrialism in the Western metropolises, Europe turned again to the African continent for the cheap supply of raw materials and hoped to establish future markets on the continent. Secondly, the increase in commercial rivalries between European powers culminated in the division of the African continent between these imperial forces. In the Treaty of Paris and the partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, the French ceded the territory between Cameroon and Gabon to Spain.

The Spanish metropolitan authorities responded to the move to colonize the mainland by sending condemned prisoners and deportees (Ndongo 1977: 67). Spain's attempts to subdue the people within its boundaries was a violent enterprise both physically and psychologically. Justo Bolekia Boleká describes the Spanish occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Si en la década de los ochenta, asistíamos a la ofensiva contra los Fang, tanto por parte de Alemania (1886) como por la de Francia (1886), en este comienzo del siglo XX los españoles tomaron la firme decisión de imponerse con violencia a todos aquellos grupos autóctonos que osaron levantarse contra ellos. El primer cuarto del siglo XX se caracterizó por el uso de métodos violentos por parte de los colonizadores, con el propósito de debilitar a los autóctonos y evitar que pusieran en peligro los logros obtenidos en lo que se refiere al cultivo del cacao, del café, de la caña de azúcar, etc. (Boleká 73)

To further disadvantage their native opponents and assure their victory in this confrontation, the Germans ceased the sale of ammunition to Africans. Although in an initial phase, missionary activities among the native Bubi were unsuccessful, the Catholic Church would later prove to be complicit in the colonial enterprise. Their missionary activities and evangelization among the natives served to infiltrate the local populations and to attack native customs, practices and traditions which seemed contrary to Spanish Catholic morals (Nerín 1999). Secondly, it interfered in local politics through its position as intermediaries between Bubi leaders and the Spanish administration on the island. Despite the Bubi's long and arduous resistance, the meddling tactics of the missionaries coupled with factionalism among the Bubi chieftains created profound fragmentation of Bubi resistance. Once subdued, the Spanish imposed a system of forced labour on the Bubi, whose dwindling native population was unable to supply the labor needed to maintain the plantation system.

Furthermore, the unwillingness of the Bubi, the Fang and other native ethnic groups to work in the cocoa plantations in Fernando Poo created a labour shortage. This gave way to the creation of the office of the *Cudaduría Colonial* in 1901. Its function was to dispense justice within the laboral contract between the plantation workers and their new masters. Its secondary function was to provide a constant supply of labour needed for the exploitation of cocoa. A royal decree on June 11, 1904 claimed all the territories of Spanish Guinea as Spanish lands and this caused a scramble for land among the Spaniards living on the mainland. The Spanish did not abide by these laws concerning the regimented use of lands and expropriated communal lands from many of these indigenous communities. Official records fail to specify the exact level of economic benefit that Spain derived from Spanish Guinea as

a colony. However, the imposition of taxation of exportations of Cocoa and Coffee provide evidence of massive economic exploitation (Ndongo-Bidyogo 1977: 37-40).

1.4 Hispanicization

One important legacy of the Spanish civilizing mission within the territories of Spanish Guinea is the Hispanic culture. Within this colonial enterprise, Hispanicization was an aggressive political, religious, economic and social action through which the colonizers transmitted Spanish civilization to the native communities. In brief, Hispanicization was the vehicle to psychologically acculturate their African subjects into accepting Hispanic social ideals and morals (Ocha'a Mve Bengobesama 78). Spain imported its formal system of education as a way to eradicate elements of local culture which they deemed barbaric and incompatible with Spanish culture.

In 1928, the *Patronato de Indigenas* was created, and this served to regulate civil rights status, economic prospects and social mobility of the Africans who found themselves living within Spanish territories. Ndongo- Bidyogo describes this Act as: “una institución de carácter público con personalidad propia y capacidad para adquirir, poseer y enajenar bienes de todas clases, encargada de coadyuvar a la acción colonizadora del Estado, procurando el fomento, desarrollo y defensa de los intereses morales y materiales de los indígenas que no pueden valerse por sí mismos” (55). This form of social control subverted the local social hierarchies within the indigenous societies. Under this Act, it accorded “emancipado pleno,” “emancipado parcial,” and “no emancipado” statuses to their African subjects (Ndongo-Bidyogo and N'gom 15). These attainments of each status gave the native individual some conditional rights. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo explains the requirements:

Para obtener la plena emancipación era necesario tener veintiún años ...estar en posesión de un título académico o profesional otorgado por una Universidad, Colegio de Segunda Enseñanza o centro oficial español; estar empleado durante dos años, como mínimo, en un establecimiento industrial o agrícola propiedad de un español, con un salario mínimo de 5.000 pesetas anuales, o el estar al servicio del Estado con una categoría no inferior a la de auxiliar indígena. (57)

The implementation of the *Patronato de Indigenas* and the requirements it laid down for acquiring the status of “emancipado pleno” had negative consequences for the local Bubi and the Fang whose cultures could not provide the requirements for attaining the status of freemen. It inducted the natives into a central economic, social and political hierarchy in which they were disadvantaged. This further constrained the Bubi into accepting Spanish authority in hopes of attaining full civil rights within the new socio-political economy.² The imperial project in an initial phase focused primarily on the island region of the colony. This, coupled with Fang resistance on the mainland, resulted in a meagre number of Fang people being able to attain this status. Consequently, only the Fernandinos who were the local aristocracy before Spanish possession of the island were not affected much by the imposition of this new hierarchy.³

² With the increasing cocoa plantations on the island, the Spanish administrators could not get the much-needed labor from the Bubi and sought to extract it by force. According to Chira, “In 1904, the Colonial authorities mandated that all “unemancipated Africans” were supposed to work for two years on a European plantation. Those who were emancipated were expected to provide another laborer who could substitute them and work for four years or pay a fee” (5).

³ The Spanish did not view the adoption of Western religion by the anglicized Fernandinos as a threat to their mission on the island because even though this class deferred to the English monarchy, the Spanish colonial administrators in Fernando Po looked to “emancipados” and free people of color in the Caribbean as potential settlers who could spread Catholicism and Hispanic culture on the island (Chira 4).

Language and the Catholic faith were significant instruments in the Hispanicization efforts carried out by the colonial administration. By 1885, Spain had passed a law that made Spanish the official language in the colony. In the early 1900s, however, the Spanish saw the adherence of Fernandinos to English language as a threat to their imposition of Spanish language and culture. Before Spain's arrival, the basic education provided by the English missionaries in Fernando Po used the English language as the medium of instruction. In order to avoid resistance from these groups, the Spanish administration gradually replaced the use of English in these schools with Spanish. Earlier on in the Iberian Peninsula, the *Ley de Instrucción Pública* passed in 1857 guaranteed the Catholic Church control over education in Spain and in all its colonies. Hence, the basic education Spain provided under this scheme included Christian doctrine and sacred History. Spain made its language the sole recognized medium of transaction in the colony in 1907, and all subsequent decrees, administrative, legislative and educational were all meant to regularize Spanish within the colony (Rodríguez Castillo 146-53).

These mechanisms of colonial administration further alienated the native from his traditional culture. They aimed to create subjects who will be loyal to the civilizing mission and adherents of Spanish culture. The missionized Bubi were pulled into the local cocoa colonial economy, a move which drew them away from their local political authorities and culture. In the late 20s, Clarentian missionary secondary education was almost exclusive to the island of Fernando Po and recorded high levels of native Bubi enrollment. By 1949, Bubi acculturation was more intense than among the Fang on the continent. By the mid-twentieth century, a clear majority of the Bubi had accepted Spanish religious practices, and seventy-five percent of the Bubi were literate in Spanish. The *Patronato de Indigenas* over the years

experienced minor modifications but stayed in effect until 1958. However, Sundiata writes that by 1960, the Bubi, considered the most acculturated group, were a quasi-literate people who had accepted Spanish citizenship (176).

Violent acculturation is what best characterizes Spanish relations with the Fang. First, the agreement between the Spanish and the Germans in 1913, which prohibited the sale of arms to the Fang within Spanish territory debilitated their resistance to the Spanish (Boleká 83). In contrast to the Bubi and other ethnic populations, the Fang on the mainland continually resisted European missionary attempts to spread Catholicism and still adhered to the *Bieri* religion. An increasing number of young men who worked in lumber camps embraced the transethnic *Bwiti* movement (Sundiata 1996: 160). Bolekia Boleká explains:

La aculturación practicada contra este pueblo por parte de la Iglesia colonial no logró modificar, de forma integral, las costumbres consideradas como «salvajes» por parte de los colonizadores. Entre estas costumbres figuraban la «dotación» de la familia de la novia en los matrimonios tradicionales (muchas veces decididos al margen de la opinión o sentimientos de la mujer), la poligamia, las prácticas religiosas tradicionales, etc. La entrega de la dote por parte del hombre fue considerado como una venta de la novia por sus padres. La misma cultura Fang consideraba la dote una especie de seguro y reconocimiento del esfuerzo de los padres en la educación y la formación de esa joven casadera. (Boleká 84)

Such misinterpretations of Fang culture coupled with the Fangs' fierce resistance to enslavement in Spanish plantations in Fernando Po encouraged the colonial infantry to pacify their settlements. The imperial military presence was necessary to maintain the hard-won

subjugation of the Fang people, who continued to resist Spanish authority in remote areas. Justo Bolekia Boleká describes Fang resistance in the 1920s:

La reacción de los Fang ante la actitud beligerante de los colonizadores hizo que en la década de los años veinte, las autoridades coloniales españolas fueran tajantes al advertir a los colonos cazadores, exploradores, misioneros, etc., que sus vidas correrían peligro si franqueaban el límite que los Fang habían impuesto, frontera que ellos mismos denominaron “niefang”. (Boleká 85)

The Spanish colonizing tradition on the island of Fernando Po and the mainland region of Río Muni developed in a way that would impact the future political relations between the mainland, Río Muni and the island, Fernando Po. When Spain ceded autonomy to the colony, the differences between these two groups became evident. Given that the various communities had maintained vastly different relations with the colonial administration, it was inevitable that they would each develop a distinct political perspective when the question of independence was broached.

1.5 Decolonization

In December 1955, Spain joined the United Nations in an environment of growing anti-colonial sentiments within its member states. Spain’s admission to the UN placed it under the obligation of declaring the state of its colony. Under increasing pressure, Spain denied any acts of colonialism, claiming its African territories as overseas provinces which were covered by the international principle of non- intervention (Campos 97). In order to maintain their interests on both ends, the metropole rushed to provincialize her African territories and subsequently proceeded to “africanize” by changing its administrative stipulations to admit

Guineans into its management of these territories. In 1956, Fernando Po and Río Muni were declared provinces of Spain (Boleká 89). Through its assimilationist policies, the colonial government granted Guineans participation in the country's administration, while Spain continued to maintain its control over these territories (Campos 97-98). By 1960, Spain's position as a colonial power was not popular. In the face of the threat of annexation of this Spanish territory by Gabon, early in 1961, Spain finally ceded by granting autonomy to Guineans (Ndongo- Bidyogo 1977: 96).

Granting autonomy to Guinean provinces produced unexpected results and highlighted the polarities that the colonial situation had helped to create. Ndongo- Bidyogo explains that Guineans interpreted this move as a step closer to independence. Although granting autonomy was not problematic, the unequal colonial relations Spain sustained with the different ethnic groups within these territories made the question of independence and its final resolution chaotic. As a result, the emergence of a double discourse on independence was inevitable. Alicia Campos attributes this to ethnic diversity within these provinces, each of whose status determined the relations each group maintained with the colonial power. For instance, while the Fang particularly condemned the illegality of colonialism, there were other groups who advocated continued relations with the mother country, Spain (102). Spain responded by issuing a four- year term on the colony's autonomous status, a status which it will renew if Guineans did not formally demand their independence (Boleká 98).

Between 1963 and 1968, various political parties emerged. Each one reflected the diversity within the colony, as well as the unique relationship each had experienced with the Spanish administration, and these determined their political affinities. Although each party had a unique vision of autonomy, their ideological platforms were shaped by the old and

emerging interests of the native elite (Sundiata 1996: 55-62). The leading parties visibly active in this period were the Movimiento de Unión Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial (MUNGE). Bonifacio Ondo Edu founded the MUNGE during the autonomy era in 1964. However, MUNGE's affinity with the colonial regime caused disenchantment among its followers, especially as it proved either reluctant or slow to decolonize. Another platform canvassing for independence was the Movimiento Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial (MONALIGE). This movement started two decades earlier, attracted mainly Bubi people. MONALIGE advocated for a political and administrative separation of Fernando Po from Río Muni.

Another pro-independence group, the Idea Popular de Guinea Ecuatorial (IPGE), had been founded by Fang people exiled in Cameroon in the previous decade. A fourth political movement advocating independence was the Unión Popular de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial (UPLGE). Ondó Edú created this party in Gabon before independence and it is comprised mainly of people of Fang ethnicity (Sundiata 1990: 55-62). For a brief while, MONALIGE and IPGE merged into a new political front called Frente Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial (FRENAPO). However, this alliance was brief due to its internal factionalisms. According to a political observer, these political campaigns were "dominated by strong personalities and ethnic considerations rather than party politics." (Pélissier 19). For instance, whereas the Unión Bubi was in favour of total separation from the mainland province of Río Muni and of securing Bubi interests, the Unión Democrática Fernandina sought to protect powerful Spanish interests on Bioko through a solution that would secure the island from mainland domination (Sundiata 1990: 58).

1.6 Independence

The period of autonomy sharply emphasized the differences between the two main regions of the territories of Spanish Guinea. In the constitutional conferences held on the question of transfer of power and independence, it became evident that there was no common ground between the leaders of these parties because they differed politically, linguistically, culturally and geographically (Ndongo- Bidyogo 120). Their only uniting experience had been Spanish colonialism. Within this polyphony, the Foreign ministry's interest was the decolonization of Spanish Guinea so that Spain could maintain a favourable international opinion within the United Nations (Campos 108). Within this period, the once-powerful economic interests of the Spanish government in this territory began to wane. Additionally, with the increasing pressure from the international community to grant Guinea its independence no later than 1968, the final resolution of the constitutional conferences made clear that the colony would reach independence as a single political unit. It also announced the preparation of electoral law and a democratic constitution for the new country, which would be submitted to a referendum to the Guinean people. Within this period, separatists lobbying- delegates from Fernando Po continued unheeded. On August 11, 1968, the colony held a referendum, and it once again highlighted the extreme factionalism of the different political groups advocating for independence. While the Fang-dominated political party campaigned in favour of the constitution, the island separatists stood against it (Campos 113).

The approval of the constitution by the Fang majority paved the way for the presidential and provincial elections. The colonial administration supervised the electoral campaign. United Nations observers, as well as the African Union representative were also present. Around this time, IPGE, MUNGE and MONALIGE decided to merge into a three-

party coalition. The Spanish government, whose presence seemed absent within these developments intervened by throwing its weight behind three of the presidential candidates: Atanasio Ndong, Ondó Edú, and Edmundo Bosío Dioco. These three candidates had failed to win the support of most Guineans. However, Macías Nguema, a former civil servant of the colonial administration who did not have firm political convictions, was successful in gaining the support of the younger voters through radicalized language. Consequently, he won the presidential election, and the colonial government concluded the transfer of power to him on October 12, 1968 in the capital Santa Isabel.

1.7 The Macías Nguema Regime

The period following independence is synonymous with the dictatorship of Macías Nguema, the silencing and exile of intellectuals, arbitrary incarcerations and mass killings.⁴ Max Liniger-Goumaz estimates that approximately 125,000 citizens, which was about a quarter of the country's population, went into exile in neighbouring African countries and in Spain (56). Critics have described the underlying ideology of Macías Nguema's rule as Nguemism, a pseudophilosophy or a pseudoideology that manages the state as the private entity belonging to the dictator, Macías Nguema and his family. Nguemism is defined by nepotism, ethnocentrism or clanism, torture and the violation of human rights and the deprivation of all personal freedoms (Bolekia Boleká 124). Liniger-Goumaz calls this ethnocentric style of governance "afro-fascism" (14-15) while M'bare N'gom describes this dictatorship as one

⁴ There are no exact figures and estimates on how many people died or fled the country vary. For instance, Simon Baynham, reports the following "By the time of Colonel Teodoro Nguema's coup last August, President Macias's 11 years of rule had resulted in between 35-50,000 deaths, with at least one quarter of the country's 350,000 estimated population in exile. Exiles in Madrid claim that Macias is responsible for as many as 80,000 deaths" (69).

based on a violent and vertical monoethnic discourse (66). Although his leadership ideologies are not clearly defined, he exploited some communist practices to his benefit (Negrín-Fajardo 484-86). Macías Nguema's alliance with the satellites of the communist bloc such as Cuba, North Korea, and China enabled him to appropriate some characteristics of communist leadership such as authoritarianism, and a cult of personality developed around the leader.

Macías Nguema was not a well-known figure in the early nationalist movements which sought freedom from Spain before the autonomy period. However, he gained visibility during the presidential campaign. He was a civil servant in the colonial administration, and later became Vice-President of the autonomous government during the decolonization period. Decalo notes that "Nguema was viewed by the colonial administration as an essentially apolitical, pliable, and trustworthy collaborator (at a time when the Spanish were hard-pressed to find loyal allies within a Fang elite mostly in self-exile and in opposition to continued Spanish colonialism); as a consequence, his career prospects suddenly brightened in the 1960s" (76). Nguema's entry into the political arena because of Spanish colonialist patronage quickly backfired. His rise to power, aided by Spanish colonial interests and his servile façade, hid pent-up resentment towards his benefactors (77). It soon became apparent when he assumed office that Guinea's new leader was unpopular among his cabinet ministers and politically unprepared to lead this newly created country.

In March 1969, the attempted coup of Atanasio Ndong, the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, worsened Macías Nguema's paranoia of an imperialist takeover. Under this pretext, he suspended the constitution and conferred all legislative and judicial powers onto himself. His cabinet from then onwards had a high turnover, especially with appointed ministers who acted contrary to his expectations being made to disappear, "committing

suicide” or escaping into exile. The ministerial functions, which merely existed on paper, were filled by members of a close family circle of the Esangui, with his nephew and current President Teodoro Obiang as the Head of Security. He failed to institute the national coalition government he has promised and banned all political parties. Macías Nguema was extremely sensitive to any opposition in his country and permitted only one party, the Partido Unico Nacional de Trabajadores. The Partido Unico Nacional de Trabajadores (PUNT), together with the Juventud en Marcha con Macías, the Milicia popular, as well as the Guardia Nacional became the props which he used to instill terror and to maintain the population under strict vigilance.

Within six months of independence, Nguema suspended all diplomatic relations with Spain. This set off the mass exodus of European expatriates who abandoned vast acres of cocoa plantations on Fernando Po, causing a sharp decline in the country’s external income. Decalo observes that by the end of March 1969, 92 percent of the Spanish community had fled Equatorial Guinea. It significantly reduced the state’s foreign income from cocoa exports and the wages of several contract migrant labourers hung in the balance. Due to abysmal management, the hasty nationalization of cocoa plantations and the loss of skilled migrant labour, the country’s economy declined quickly. Coupled with the maltreatment, deaths and harassment of the migrant labour force, the Nigerian government intervened and repatriated its citizens and contract workers from this volatile atmosphere. The withdrawal of the Nigerian workforce obliged the recruitment of about 2,500 males from each of the country’s ten districts (85). This forced recruitment, akin to slave labour, drove many thousands into refuge in the neighbouring countries of Cameroon and Gabon.

At the apex of his power, his paranoia and his resentment for intellectuals and educated people led him on a witch hunt of individuals who he perceived to be socially superior to him. In order to understand this lengthy dictatorship, it is imperative to understand Nguema's manipulation of traditional beliefs and religion. It was widely believed that he practiced sorcery and witchcraft, and his possession of supernatural abilities terrified citizens. Nguema felt continuously threatened by organized religion such as Christianity, so he sought to subdue Catholicism. Mbomio Bacheng's novel, *El párroco de Niefang*, denounces Nguema's systematic persecution of the clergy through the reaffirmation of his belief in the Catholic God. Decalo writes: "one popular slogan all priests were forced to reiterate in all church services- at the pain of immediate arrest- was that 'God created Equatorial Guinea thanks to Papa Macías. Without Macías, Equatorial Guinea would not exist'" (80). In a significant attack on organized religion, Macías Nguema denounced Christianity as alien to Africans and under the pretext of a campaign of authenticity, he banned the use of Christian names. In November 1974 and again in April 1975, he banned all religious activities; sermons, meetings, funerals, and closed all churches. Feeling increasingly insecure in Malabo, Nguema often retreated to his native Mongomo district, where he held infrequent audiences on government matters.

Independence from Spain did not translate as freedom for Guinean citizens. Political observers have noted that this leadership failed to address Guinea's social and political problems (Decalo 54). Nguema's regime, their lack of strategy for development and its nepotism, coupled with extremely inefficient management and arbitrary incarcerations drove many citizens to flee the country. M'bare N'gom remarks that at the cultural level, nguemist ideologies were initially erected as a kind of anti-colonial nationalism in response to a

suspected neo-imperialist encroachment. However, it staged a systematic attack on the cultural diversity within Guinea. Through the imposition of an Africanization campaign, it attempted to break any ties that the citizenry had with Europe, especially Spain (386). Nguemism, thus, governed the country around a clan hegemony more than through an anti-colonialist ideology. By 1979 when he was overthrown, the hitherto vibrant nation and promising economy were in shambles.

Political observers have referred to Macías Nguema as the “Caligula” of Africa who failed to create a government relevant to Guinea’s problems (Decalo 54; Baynham 69). Nguema’s idea of decolonizing Equatorial Guinea imagined the ethnically and culturally diverse groups within the country along monoethnic lines. Despite the immense appeal that nationalist movements had held for the formerly colonized masses, as an anti-colonial nationalism, Nguemism not only failed to represent the entire nation but revealed the unresolved tensions between the different social groups that colonialism had ignored. His government appropriated instruments of imperialism such as history-writing, and national history became the canvas onto which the dictator projected his personal achievements.

1.8 **Materia Reservada**

One of the most surprising developments under this mercurial dictatorship is the international community's silent reaction to the mayhem that the independence administration created. In the aftermath of independence, Spanish and Guinean relations deteriorated quickly. This was precipitated by Spain’s inability to continually sustain Equatorial Guinea financially due to its decapitalization of Guinean industries in the last days of colonialism and Guinea’s nationalization of the same following independence (Quintana Navarro 519-520). Secondly, Macías Nguema’s accusations of Spanish involvement in the attempted coup had brought

Guinea's relationship with Spain to a breaking point, and heightened political and ethnic tensions for Spaniards and Guineans within the country. By March 1969, Spanish companies were forced to, at first, reduce their personnel significantly, and then later, to abandon the country in fear of their lives. In 1972, after a steady exodus of Spaniards from Guinea, Madrid responded to this political disaster by classifying as "Materia reservada" all news from Guinea.

This fracture of relations between Spain and Guinea held terrible consequences, especially for Guinean students who found themselves in Spain during this time. Under provincialization, Spain had granted double nationality to Guineans. In the wake of its withdrawal from Guinea, Spain rescinded their citizenship and its educational scholarships to Guineans, many of whom were university students and clergymen in vocational training (Molinero 161). Meanwhile, Macías ordered Guineans repatriated back home. Many of the repatriated were imprisoned and tortured. For those who refused to return, their status tethered between immigrant and refugee with neither country recognizing them, nor providing the necessary economic support they needed (Fernandez 223). Stripped of nationality, without documentation, and in dire straits, the once welcoming "motherland" had become a hostile environment overnight. Spain's ban on news from their homeland effectively shrouded Macías' government and their violations of citizens' rights in secrecy.

Molinero observes that under General Franco, Spain herself did not have the conducive political atmosphere necessary to receive people fleeing from a bloody dictatorship (161). In other words, Guineans were unlucky to find themselves escaping from an authoritarian government while in the firm grip of a Spanish dictatorship. As Alejandra Mahiques explains, Spain's decision to remain silent on the political disaster in their ex-

colony cannot be tacked down to a single reason. She considers that the ban was put into effect after “the reprisals carried out by Macías Nguema against the Spanish community in response to criticism received from the Spanish press” (8). Furthermore, other sources claimed that it was a “strategy to protect the economic interests of Spanish politicians who had for years invested and earned large sums from the cocoa, coffee and timber exploitations” (9). However, she maintains that, above all, it was the Spanish State’s feeling of shame for its failure in the post-independence process that led to its abysmal relations with the new leader (9).

Despite the Spanish administration's silence, Spain continued to maintain a dubious trade relationship with Equatorial Guinea, an economic arrangement that helped sustain the long dictatorship. With the double censorship, news on Equatorial Guinea was scarce and often arrived too late. Organizations continued to petition and NGOs sent humanitarian reports to the United Nations. However, nothing was done about the situation in Guinea from Spain until the Transitional Government lifted the ban in 1977 (Mahiques 60-2). Fegley writes that:

The most shocking feature of the Macías era was not so much the atrocities themselves as the lack of concern by which the terror was obscured. The Spanish and the OAU were both comforted by the bureaucratic inertia, which settled over the case. Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon all feared reprisals. The Chinese felt that they couldn’t let the Russians steal a march on them when the USSR, Cuba and other Soviet Bloc countries were getting strategic and ideological gains... But these were not the only reasons for covering up the repressive and brutal methods of the Macías regime. There was a large

element of guilt involved on the parts of both Spain and the various African governments concerned (123).

Even with the presence of groups from other countries and U.S interests in the increasing dependence of Guinea on communist countries, the sanguinary governance of Guinean people was still underreported. Macías Nguema's animosity towards the West had driven him to seek alternative economic and technical assistance from the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and Cuba, a situation which raised Washington's concern over Guinea's links with communism (Jensen 6-11).⁵ Although the Soviet Union's military assistance provided to Equatorial Guinea was relatively small compared to its regional neighbours, these contributions incited fears in Washington and other countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon of Equatorial Guinea as a viable platform for a revolutionary takeover.

Fegley concludes that "Under Macías, a protective wall of silence was built by ensuring all major powers, neighbouring nations, and potentially concerned parties had vested interest in the regime irrespective of the terror it fostered" (liii). *Los Poderes de la Tempestad* criticizes this *materia reservada* policy whereby classifying information on Equatorial Guinea shrouded Guinea's government's brutalities from the rest of the world. Similarly, Guinea's neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Gabon and Nigeria, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN), said little and failed to respond adequately to the political situation and the ill-treatment of Guinean citizens.

⁵ Geoffrey Jensen writes that "For U.S policy towards Equatorial Guinea, practical military interests and international relations outweighed ideology" (13).

Materia reservada is synonymous with how Spain sought to distance itself from the increasing civil and political mayhem for which it was partly responsible. It is about the Spanish press's silence on the political chaos left behind, the complex networks of censorships between the Francoist dictatorship and the nguemist regime, and the complicity of Macías Nguema's allies, all of whom preferred to safeguard their particular interests. Ndongo-Bidyogo's novel *Los poderes de la tempestad* narrativizes this situation and denounces this nexus of censorships by demonstrating the frivolity behind the reasons for this law of silence, which cost many Guinean lives.

1.9 Golpe de Libertad

By 1979, the country was in dire economic straits. Shortly after public civil servants demonstrated over their delayed paychecks, Macías Nguema had five National Guard members shot for demanding their wages. One of the executed officers was the brother of Lieutenant Colonel Teodoro Obiang. He was not only Nguema's nephew but also the Minister of Defense, a position widely believed to have been instrumental in the liquidation of senior officials (Sundiata 1990: 75). Nguema was finally ousted in a coup d'état organized by his subalterns. On August 18, 1979, he was arrested while fleeing into neighbouring Gabon and imprisoned in Bata. It is hard to provide exact figures as to how many people had been killed on his orders, had gone into exile or had disappeared throughout his regime. Nguema, together with six other members of his government, were tried for directly ordering the killings of about 1,000 people within the first five years of his reign, although it is estimated that he ordered the massacre of many more (Ndongo-Bidyogo 221). The new government, made up mainly of members of the old regime, promised change. However, Guineans remained skeptical of the new administration's promises. Under the Obiang regime, human rights

violations, inadequate infrastructure and poor disbursement of the country's petrodollars continue to plague this nepotistic government. The opulent lifestyles of Obiang's son and current vice-president, Teodorín, has incited criticisms and accusations of corruption within this administration from African and international observers.

Equatorial's Guinean history and its influences on citizens, at both the collective and personal levels, is often cited in the narratives that this thesis will discuss. These authors critique, oppose and attempt to undo aspects of the colonial legacy and Nguemism on personal and national lives. This chapter has signaled aspects of this history that are pertinent to the notions of resistance that this study will delve into.

2 CHAPTER 2: WRITING THE MOTHERLAND

The socio-political developments of this hispano-Bantu nation, from colonialism to its independence, have echoed in the writings of its authors, novelists and poets. The following chapter highlights its literary trajectory, followed by a review of scholarly works relevant to this dissertation.

2.1 The Colonial Novel

Unlike the poetry and prose of African writers in European colonies like the Gold Coast and Nigeria, which advocated independence from European rule, the Spanish Guinean colonial novel did not show any inclination towards national autonomy. Even with the relatively early presence of the colonial press, *La Guinea Española*, a magazine which started publication in 1901, the participation of native Guineans with creative short stories and poetry merely represented a process of collecting, transcribing and translating native literature of the different Bantu ethnicities (N'gom 590).

At the height of its colonialism, between 1953 and 1962, only two novels were published by native Guineans. They were *Cuando los Combés luchaban* (1953) by Leoncio Evita and *Una lanza por el Boabí* (1963) by Daniel Jones Mathama. This paucity of literary production and thematic engagement could be attributed to the censorship operative within the Spanish colonial apparatus. In 1953, when *Cuando los Combés luchaban* (*novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española*) was published, it followed the ethnographic literary tradition which immediately preceded it. This text replicated the external gaze of the conqueror towards the natives in its descriptions of the customs of the Combé people, and the author himself seems complicit in the colonizer's civilizing mission (Tofiño- Quesada 144). This

Eurocentric worldview through which this narrative is filtered led to its categorization as an instrument of Spanish imperialism.

Until recently, critics widely read these two colonial novels, *Cuando los Combés luchaban* and *Una lanza por el Boabí* as imperialist propaganda justifying the civilizing mission. Marvin Lewis argues against the notion some critics hold that this novel lacks an African worldview. He observes that towards the denouement of the story, the narrative blurs the lines between reality and magic. Secondly, he reiterates the traditional rulers' opposition to the civilization of the white man because of its emasculating and destructive effects on Combé culture (130-6). Similarly, Dosinda García-Alvite in her article "Recuperación de prácticas tradicionales de Guinea Ecuatorial en *Cuando los combés luchaban* de Leoncio Evita" proposes a revision of this assimilationist critique of the novel. She advances that the author Leoncio Evita wrote the text under the yoke of Spanish imperialism and its contents were subjected to the censorship of the colonial administration. The plot, based on an oral legend of the Combé people, is in fact a text that exposes the adverse effects of colonialism. García-Alvite argues that the title *Cuando los Combes luchaban* is a pretext under which the novel offers a description of the way of life of the author's people, provides a panorama of the traditions of the Combé people and registers the protests of the traditional leaders against the colonial enterprise.⁶

With these recent interpretations of Guinea's pioneer narrative, can Evita's *Cuando los combes luchaban* be read as a type of resistance against the colonial conquest? If so, in what

⁶ Nahiyé Léon Camara also poses similar questions about the possible interpretations of Evita's novel. Given the stringent censorship of the Spanish colonial apparatus, she interrogates how the author conceals his criticism of the colonial mission. See "*Cuando los combes luchaban* (1953), de Leoncio Evita Enoy: ¿proceso de perversión o de subversión discursiva?".

ways does this narrative question European legitimacy to conquest? What precedent does it set for future works which consider Spanish colonialism and its legacies? The insertion of a Combé world view that fuses magic with reality certainly disrupts the ethnographic focus that the novel has held all along and forces the imperial gaze to see beyond its own scientific world view. Evita further deviates from the Eurocentric view of African customs and rituals as atavistic and backward. In so doing, the author very subtly challenges the imperialist ability to see and to understand the people that they have conquered.

In 1962 when Daniel Jones Mathama published the second novel *Una lanza por el Baobí* in Barcelona, it seems he was unaware of the existence of Evita's work. In the prologue, *Una lanza por el Baobí* is erroneously accredited as the first novel written by a citizen of Spanish Guinea. Also considered collaborationist, Adam Lifshy concurs with this view and proposes that "Jones Mathama's failures at metropolitan mimicry, both of ideology and form, are the true success of his novel and the reason why it should be read" (110).⁷ Mathama's prologue to his text considers the racism prevalent within the colonial press in the metropolis and without critically stating his oppositionality to it, he implores his readers to ignore his African looks and consider more his assimilation of Spanish civilization. Also, the author acknowledges that he is going against the grain by publishing a historical account from the perspective of a Guinean, albeit an assimilationist one. The novel's complicity in its imperial imitation rests on its critique of the customs and way of life of the native Bubi on the island of Fernando Po. Lifshy advances that the figure of the Baobí is based on a real-life politician,

⁷ Lifshy undertakes a more in-depth analysis surrounding the authorship and the reception of this novel. See "The Turn to Africa" in the *Magellan Fallacy: Globalization and the Emergence of Asian and African Literature in Spanish* (2017).

Maximiliano Jones, the author's father, who was a sympathizer of Spanish colonial policies (118). The narrator lauds the civilizing mission, and in the same tone, criticizes the natives as barbaric.

Both novels, written under Spanish colonialism, differ in their appraisal of the colonial situation. While *Una lanza por el Baobí* is an apologia of colonialism, *Cuando los combés luchaban* speaks through a European worldview, while it still expresses the author's Combé beliefs. Marvin Lewis surmises how this ambivalence gains currency within subsequent postcolonial narratives. He writes:

These two novels began the process of "writing back" to the Spanish center from the Equatorial Guinean margins- interpreting either "real" or "imagined" circumstances. The ambivalence they express is foregrounded in the fiction of the current generation of novelists. In post-independence Equatorial Guinea, resistance, identity, place/displacement, dictatorship, the remnants of colonialism, and the construction of the sense of nationhood are the predominant motifs. (119)

These texts, which laid the foundation for the contemporary narrative, did so from a position of cultural ambivalence (Ugarte 181), a situation which announced the hybrid nature of future works.

2.2 Post-Independence Literature

When Spain finally granted Equatorial Guinea independence, the precedent set by the earliest literary works did not hold much promise for future literary works. Scholars have viewed the two novels published under the colonial administration, *Cuando los combés luchaban* (1953) by Leoncio Evita and *Una lanza por el Baobí* (1963) by Daniel Jones Mathama as widely

assimilationist in their view of Spanish imperialism. However, a recent study of Evita's novel has proposed a reconsideration of this viewpoint to consider the author's use of an oral legend to potentially subvert Spanish discourse on colonialism (Camara 105-127). Nevertheless, the spate of adverse political developments that occurred under Nguema's leadership and the dictatorship that lasted eleven years further exacerbated the discontinuities within the Guinean narrative's trajectory.

In an unfortunate and unexpected turn of events, the dictatorship staged a systematic suppression of intellectual and cultural activities. While this propelled many intellectuals into exile, it also implied that due to the strict censorship, which was operative for the duration of the dictatorship, no works would be published within the country. The sole literature which emerged during this period was among Guinean exiles and received little circulation and reception abroad. These texts expressed a deep sense of disillusionment, reflecting how the Guinean diaspora responded to the trauma of sudden displacement and exile.

2.2.1 Los Años del Silencio

The period referred to as "los años del silencio" by novelist Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo was fraught with a deathly silence and lasted between 1970 and 1980 (Trujillo 884). Within this time, intellectual activity in Guinea was considered subversive. The dictator's systematic war on education and the breakdown of cultural institutions forced many intellectuals into exile, and as a result, literacy rates dropped significantly. Among the Guinean diaspora, poetry became the preferred voice through which the exiles emitted a counter-discourse against the hegemonic one propagated by the ethnocentric government.

The few literary works that were written and published abroad formulated a poetic discourse around cultural and geographic displacement, the harsh realities of exile, and the loss of family members. Juan Balboa Boneké's collection of poetry entitled *¿Dónde estás Guinea?* (1978) captures the trauma of displacement and the pain of exile. Boneké's other works engage in a multi-dimensional analysis of the conditions which Macías Nguema manipulated to gain absolute power and denounces the government and the political and cultural chaos that it had forced Guineans to endure. Similarly, Francisco Zamora Lobo's poem "Vamos a matar al tirano" violently incites Guineans to urgently depose the dictator and restore order to Equatorial Guinea, the homeland. Lobo's poem "Bea" also reiterates the need for the African immigrant to adapt to the harsh realities of life in Europe and succinctly captures the frustrations of not finding one's place.

In a similar vein, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's works also focus on the brutal realities of displacement, incarnated in the enslaved protagonist in his poem, "La travesía", whose journey leads him to the dungeons of a waiting slave ship. Ndongo-Bidyogo's works within this period dramatize history. They portray the anguish of failed governance for many African countries and of its youth who struggle to find their place within the project of national reconstruction. In *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial*, Ndongo-Bidyogo meticulously analyzes Equatorial Guinea's historical trajectory as well as the immediate context of the Nguema government and denounces the official and hegemonic rhetoric of the regime. M'bare N'gom surmises that the alternative discourse engaged in by the writers of this generation was an effort to recuperate the national and traditional history and culture that had been confiscated, ethnicized, and manipulated to legitimize and sacralize the figure of Macías Nguema and his discourse of nationalism (2012: 31).

2.2.2 La Nueva Generación

The literary drought in Guinea was broken with the dictator's overthrow in 1979, and in 1980 the first literary works began to appear. The emergence of these literary works was facilitated partly by Spain's transition from Franco's dictatorship to democracy. This political change in Spain allowed for the *Materia reservada* ban on Equatorial Guinea to be lifted, and this, in turn, opened avenues for publication. Secondly, the Obiang administration also directed a less austere outlook towards revitalizing cultural activities (N'gom 2003: 597).

In the following years, two cultural centers were established in Malabo (Bioko) and Bata (Río Muni). The cultural centre in Malabo founded the Ediciones del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano, which oversaw the production and circulation of two journals: *Africa 2000* and *El Patio* (M'bare N'gom 597). However, the first novels within this period were written and published by Guineans exiled in Spain. In 1985, María Nsué Angüe published *Ekomo*, the first novel by a Guinean female author. It tells the story of Nnanga, a Fang woman who searches for a cure for her husband, Ekomo's gangrene-infested foot. This story highlights the tensions of a society caught between the modern and the traditional. *Ekomo* offers an introspective look into the woman's condition within Fang society and criticizes gendered discrimination from a marginalized female protagonist's perspective.

In the same year, Juan Balboa Boneké published *El reencuentro: el retorno del exiliado*. It retraces the journey of a returned exile to his homeland and describes the trauma that the citizens suffered under Nguema's administration. Following this, in 1987, Bidyogo-Ndongo's published the first installment of a trilogy, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*. It is a bildungsroman that is set during the Spanish colonial era. It recounts an unnamed protagonist's psychological struggle as he tries to negotiate cultural tensions between his

native Fang heritage and the Western culture he is assimilating. Among this generation of authors, their works are more critical in tone and break away from the so-called literature of consent or assimilation of the previous generation to tackle the effects of colonialism, the negotiation of identity, and the traumatic effects of the Nguema dictatorship on its peoples. Furthermore, they reflect on and address the adverse effects of imperialism on their communities from the moment of colonization to contemporary times.

2.2.3 Los Años de la Esperanza

In the 1990s, a new generation of writers born and raised in Equatorial Guinea began to publish, thanks to the continued efforts of the two main cultural centers located in Malabo and Bata. As most of these authors had experienced neither the political post-independence destabilization nor the trauma of exile, their literary output, style, and vision differed from the generation that preceded them. As such, their perspective often tackled the devastating realities of life in a post-Nguema nation. The literary output during this time is diverse and encompasses novels, short stories and poetry. Notable works among this generation are *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* (1994) by Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, *Huellas bajo tierra* (1998) by Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng, *La Carga* (1999) by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* (2000) by José Fernando Siale Djangany and Donato Ndong-Bidyogo and M'bare N'gom's *Antología de la literatura guineana* (2000). This era also saw many new authors and some female voices as well. Guillermina Mekuy's *El llanto de la perra* (2005) and *Las tres vírgenes de Santo Tomás* (2008) are notable mentions within this category because these

novels reiterate the paucity of the feminine perspective within literary productions of the post-Nguema regime.⁸

M'bare N'gom notes that one such novel by Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, *El párroco de Niefang* (1996), explores new forms of narration to convey the reality of Guinean life post-independence. Contrary to the previous generation's works, these texts were only minimally influenced by the rich oral tradition but instead looked to their immediate environment for inspiration (2012: 37). As such, *El párroco de Niefang* performs an immediate post-mortem of sorts by examining the psychological and social wounds inflicted by the recently ended dictatorship and the Guinean community's double cultural heritage.

Similarly, the introspective tone of *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) by Donato Ndongo- Bidyogo interrogates the continuities of oppression through its exploration of the ideological parameters of the Nguema administration. This narrative articulates the need for Guineans to formulate a unique national discourse relevant to the country's needs. This critical voice calls for a national self-examination, and new rhetoric on national identity as the primordial step in rebuilding the nation amplifies our reading, perception and understanding of resistance within this post-colonial context. In a similar vein, *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel undertakes a re-inscription of the history and voices of the residents of the island of Annobón. This move signals the peripheral position the island occupies in relation to the past and other socio-cultural discourses within the country post-

⁸ The list provided in this section is not comprehensive, and M'bare N'gom and Trujillo both compile a more exhaustive bibliography. However, despite the extensive literary output, N'gom observes that the feminine perspective is still lacking, and the paucity of women's voices within the context of written literature and outside of it presents an interesting avenue for future scholarship.

independence. The narrator's use of childhood memory here for reinscribing the social histories of the Annobonese around the time of the cholera epidemic, which ravaged the island during the seventies, shows how the Nguema regime's authoritarianism further marginalized and isolated the people on the island from the rest of their compatriots.

2.3 The Equatorial Guinean Postcolonial Novel

As the field of Equatorial Guinean literature continues to expand, scholars are still making significant contributions to the study of its literature mainly using a postcolonial theoretical approach. Most of the research on these novels is in the format of monographs, articles and doctoral dissertations. This section presents a brief literature review that highlights aspects of their analysis relevant to this thesis.

Denise Price's dissertation "'Materia reservada' no more: the postcolonial in the Equato-Guinean Narrative" foregrounds the theme of subversion of the colonial discourse through its postcolonial framework. In this work, she examines the roles of Spanish colonialism in the creation of a postcolonial identity. Approaching the narrative works *Ekomo*, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *Los poderes de la tempestad*, *La Carga* and *Adjá-Adjá and Other Stories* through a postcolonial theoretical framework, Price's dissertation identifies the ways in which these texts subvert colonial discourse to empower the voices of the marginalized. Similarly, Jorge Salvo's doctoral dissertation, "La formación de identidad en la novela hispano-africana: 1950-1990," also examines the construction of identity, albeit from a collective perspective. His research attempts to delineate the formation of this postcolonial identity through an analysis of selected novels as a response to the debate surrounding the

nature of the country's literary identity. In contrast to Price, Salvo discusses the construction of identity with a focus on the indigenous contribution. Although he highlights Spain's political dominance as an influential factor, he leans in favour of the hybrid concept of identity advanced by Bhabha. For him, the Guinean identity represented in the novels within this period fuses African culture with Western cultural elements to create a unique postcolonial national identity.

However, in her book, *Palabras desencadenadas: aproximación a la teoría literaria postcolonial y a la escritura hispano-negroafricana* (2010), Natalia Álvarez Méndez argues that the theoretical underpinnings within the writings of many postcolonial Equatoguinean authors are syncretic. Her analysis points to a mixture of European beliefs and the traditional African concepts of man and his relationship to the world. She also signals texts in which one perceives an adaptation of European religions to African religious belief systems (135-37). Naomi McCleod's dissertation "The Expression of Identity in Equatorial Guinean Narratives (1994 - 2007)" probes this identity further by examining how Guinean authors use symbolic situational interactions to represent identity. In her final conclusions, she seems to suggest Guinean collective and individual identity as a kind of shifting terrain on which characters negotiate plural identities as they interact with people from different social backgrounds (2011).

Another critic has studied these novels from the perspective of memory. In her dissertation, "Aproximaciones literarias a la memoria, historia e identidad en la literatura contemporánea de Guinea Ecuatorial," Clelia Olímpia Rodríguez advances that these texts take refuge within the psychological spaces of personal memory to narrate tragic episodes in the personal lives of these characters as counter-narratives of official history. These stories,

she argues, coincide with pivotal historical times to emphasize the intersectionality of private and collective experiences and serve to denounce the atrocities committed by Spanish colonialism and the independence government.

Rodríguez's preoccupation with history is echoed in the work of Joseph Otabela. In his book, *Entre estética y compromiso: La obra de Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo* (2008), which is dedicated to discussing the works of Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, traces how this author's literary career has been devoted to drawing attention to Equatorial Guinea and its situation, particularly in Spain. In a detailed compilation of this novelist's most significant works, Otabela underscores how the social, political and historical are irrevocably intertwined in Ndongo's works. He maintains that this author's works react not only to the double censorship that Equatorial Guinea was placed under during the seventies by Spain and then by Macías Nguema, but it also shows a deep commitment to the pursuit of true independence for his native land.

Other critical interventions on *Los poderes de la tempestad* by Ndongo- Bidyogo discuss the country's degeneration under the Nguema regime. Marvin Lewis' book, *An Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea: Between Colonialism and Dictatorship* (2007) introduces the reader to a compendium of texts that are significant in considerations of Equatorial Guinean literary trajectory. In his turn to *Los poderes de la tempestad*, he explains the tensions that the return of the unnamed protagonist in this novel provokes and concludes that the novel depiction of life under the Nguema regime reveals the complex intersection of political, moral and social chaos reigning in the country as well as the connections between Equatorial Guinea's historical past and its present circumstances.

The style of narration and the spaces used to explore the history of Equatorial Guinea within Ndongo's work have received some commentary. M'bare N'gom's article "La autobiografía como plataforma de denuncia en *Los poderes de la tempestad*" examines how the narrator-witness-protagonist figure uses the autobiography to denounce the brutality of the Macías Nguema regime. He advances that the novel's use of the autobiographical form deviates from the personalized style of traditional autobiographies to invoke a collective experience. Clarence Mengue's article "Lectura del espacio en *Los poderes de la tempestad*" examines the reconfiguration of space within postcolonial Equatorial Guinea. He highlights how specific places such as the capital city Malabo (Santa Isabel) and the mainland, Río Muni, are repositories of memory, both colonial and dictatorial. He contends that the author's description of space should be read as a critique of the Nguema regime and an interrogation of the ideologies of his dictatorship.

Literary critics have also commented on Nguema's regime and its absence within the discussions of representations of dictatorship in the Hispanic novel. In his book chapter entitled "Los discursos literarios sobre situaciones dictatoriales en África," Iñeke Phaf-Rheinberger focuses on how the tyranny of Macías Ngeuma was left out of the mainstream conversations of authoritarian governments in the 60s and the 70s within Hispanic works of literature. He argues that even when they acknowledge the dictatorship and its devastating effects, they fail to address these events as a political problem created by the colonial administration and Guinea's independence government.

Academic contributions on *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) have been few. In her article "Reconfiguring Historical Colonial Identity: A Cartographic Approach," Clelia Rodríguez approaches this text from a decolonial perspective and argues that the novel relies on a

cartographic gaze to “contemplate the past and utilize literature as a tool to make all the forgotten, abandoned, censored and ignored experiences visible” (211). This analysis is especially compelling as the narrative examines again the question of Guinean collective identity by predominantly examining the religious mores of its peoples.

As the literature review shows, the quest for identity features prominently in discussions of Guinean postcolonial literature. This could be attributed to the historical trajectory of Equatorial Guinea. First, the imposition of Spanish colonialism, followed by a violent dictatorship post-independence that attempted to recondition its citizens aggressively marks the departure for this search for individual and collective identity. The search for identity in these literary texts is often evoked through culture and other social institutions because usually communal or personal identity is made visible through interactions with these institutions. These narratives continuously try to define who the Equatorial Guinean is and what place this individual occupies within the African continent and within the Hispanic world. Homi Bhabha reminds us that postcolonial identities are not merely a blend of Western and non- Western cultural entities, but instead, they tether in between opposing cultures. This positionality in itself suggests at once a negation and a negotiation of identities. Bhabha argues that far from being a fixed entity, culture is constantly in flux, and the notion of a pure and distinctive identity is a myth. For Bhabha, culture is characterized by interconnectedness and mixedness, and it is continually engaged in the process of being transformed. Bhabha terms this “hybridity.”

For Achille Mbembe, postcolonial identities are in a state of constant improvisation. He observes that:

the postcolony is not made up of one coherent “public space”, nor is it determined by any single organizing principle. It is rather a plurality of “spheres” and arenas, each having its own separate logic, yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts: hence the postcolonial ‘subject’ has had to learn to continuously bargain [*marchander*] and improvise. Faced with this... the postcolonial ‘subject’ mobilizes not just a single “identity” but several fluid identities, which by their very nature, must be constantly “revised” in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required. (5)

This revision undoubtedly implicates a sense of resistance, and this discourse becomes the method through which these novels reformulate their postcolonial identity. These are questions that I address in the following chapters of this thesis, where I analyze how exactly resistance is conveyed, through which discourses these writers express the need for real emancipation, and what ideological parameters they address.

Ashcroft, Gareth, and Tiffin write that among other characteristics, postcolonial texts are typified by their “radical dismantling of the European codes ... and a subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses” (220). Although their works are produced in the post-colonial period, intellectuals from the formerly colonized areas use these types of deconstructivist discourses in literary texts to illuminate challenges within their national communities that emanate as a result of the social complexities that the colonial and indigenous encounter generated. Through this lens, readings of postcolonial texts can tackle the structures within social programming of the nation-state, which challenge individual or collective progress.

Resistance is central in creating space for negotiating cross-cultural appropriations and reformulations of personal and collective identity. The very notion of articulating identity suggests a departure from a previous model that constrained the plural identities of the subject and failed to consider cultural transformations.

2.4 The Question of Resistance

Equatorial Guinea's historical past has always reverberated in its post-independence literature. As this brief literary overview shows, Guinea's postcolonial writers respond to the cultural and political problems instigated by Spanish colonialism and the authoritarian regime that followed. Post-Nguema, the aperture of cultural centres has boosted literary activity and has brought to the fore voices that speak against the culture of silence and fear of the previous two decades. The three novels that this study will analyze are extracted from the period referred to as "los años de la esperanza" and these texts write against the invisibility of hispanoaffrican voices post-independence.

This period's literary production is shaped by a number of factors that differentiate this generation of writers from their predecessors. First, most of the writers in this group were children during Nguema's tenure and started their literary careers while still resident in the country (N'gom 2001:33-34). Their success can also be attributed to the absence of the obstacles that the previous generation of writers encountered, such as political persecution, censorship, poor access to publishers and the abject poverty of resources for writers and scholars. Also, the aperture of cultural centres in Malabo and Bata, which actively promote

and disseminate these authors' works, played a pivotal role in the reception of Guinean works.⁹

The principal theme of the three novels selected for this study is the criticism of the post-independence state as an institution that failed to meet the political and social aspirations of Guineans. Through their characters and plots, they emit a highly critical perspective that denounces the state of repression, authoritarianism, corruption, the deprivation of freedoms, nepotism, and the general economic hardships that continue to plague the country post-independence. Their tone is of a profound disappointment at the unfulfilled promise of independence. Furthermore, these narratives are also characterized by the inscription of the national community's collective experiences and a profound reflection of the brutal dictatorship from which the country has just emerged.

In contrast to the previous generation, the critical tone of these writers also extends to the Spanish colonial legacy and its continuities in Guinean society. For Nistal Rosique, these writings are marked by a critical perspective on their former colonizers as well as on the dictatorship, and the euroafricanism of its characters which is the result of personal experiences on the African and the European continents where they have lived and studied (127). These writers express their disillusionment and employ various discourses to protest

⁹ The Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano of Malabo (CCHG) first opened in 1982 and the Centro Cultural Español de Bata (CCEB) opened later in 2001. These centers were created to reactivate cultural life, promote African and Hispanic culture, especially Guinean cultures. These two centres are funded by the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) and their directors are Spanish and work with a small team in order to provide access to as many cultural events as possible. These include book presentations, art exhibitions, dramatic and musical productions, and film. There also have a library where Spanish language texts are available to the general public. The Malabo branch was later renamed Centro Cultural Español de Malabo (CCEM) in 2003 (N'gom 597).

the continuities of patterns of oppression, many of which have their roots in the colonial experience. In a sense, these writers reflect on both the colonial legacies and that of Nguemism. For Trujillo, the narratives within this corpus are marked by an experimentation with diverse literary genres as well as new forms of linguistic expression (883). An example of this phenomenon is Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *Arde el monte de noche*, which weaves Annobonese storytelling tradition into a Spanish text. Similarly, Donato Ndong-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad* coagulates the personal and collective experiences under Nguema by vacillating between two voices; a first-person and a second-person narrator.

Another uniting of these authors and their works is their shared condition of exile. Exile, as Edward Said puts it, "is not a matter of choice; you are born into it, or it happens to you" (189) and indeed, the state of exile of these three writers is emblematic of this notion.¹⁰ With the implosion of diplomatic relations, and the abrupt political turnover in Guinea, many of the students who found themselves in Spain during this time were forced to remain there. Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, among others, who Ciriaco Napo refers to as "la generación perdida", were among those who refused to respond to the President Nguema's summons to return. These students who would later form the nucleus of the country's intelligentsia, organized an opposition to Macías Nguema and his regime. N'gom has observed that it is precisely this context that led to the emergence of a concerted discourse of resistance, mainly articulated from Spain, and to a lesser extent other parts of Europe (2009: 101).

¹⁰ In the case of Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, he was forced to remain in exile in Spain after the attempted coup of March 1969. The other two authors, Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel were forced to abandon Equatorial Guinea as adults. Although they had survived the Macías regime, they had become targets for its successor, Obiang.

Furthermore, their condition of forced exile was exacerbated by the absence of support from national authorities and their struggle for daily survival, especially since the status accorded to Spanish Guinean citizens had been rescinded overnight. Additionally, the ban on news from Spain's former colony prevented the Guinean diaspora from reaching Spanish mainstream public opinion, but their sense of marginality was transformed into a site of resistance and a space of transaction. (N'gom 2009:102). According to another scholar, Miguel Ugarte, the writings of these authors underlined the importance of historical memory for the exiled. Due to the circumstances surrounding their forced displacement, these writers often contemplate their individual pasts and the national past that they had been robbed of. Under these circumstances, there was the need to recuperate that memory as well as the palpable sense of frustration when that memory is usurped by hegemonic forces (408).

N'gom again notes that, "it was a discursive practice that operated from a precarious periphery fraught with tensions and obstacles" (2009:101). However, this periphery was turned into a stepping-stone for the articulation of a discourse of resistance and national identity that transcended ethnic divisions and differences. These works constitute a first attempt to recreate post-independent unity and identity. As such, their literary production bore a critical outlook towards constructing, negotiating and articulating cultural and national identity.

These developments within the Guinean narrative provide a strong basis for examining the different ways in which the novels selected for this study protest the suppression of their freedoms and pursue the conceptualization of their nation free of the hegemonic forces that have historically shaped the emergence of Equatorial Guinea. Novels like *Los poderes de la tempestad* reflect on pivotal historical events of the postcolonial era from a literary standpoint.

This deliberation gives voice to the atrocities that have been silenced and poses questions on what it means to be truly independent. In this way, the postcolonial narrative then becomes instrumental in urging the need to address the question of effective national decolonization. In demonstrating how Nguemism steeped the nation further into a binary and ethnocentric social paradigm, these novels reiterate the urgent need for formulating a government that objectively considers the cultural diversity and the history of the country. The following study of these novels will address European colonial discourse and Nguemism and will also interrogate the legacies of colonialism through which colonial power dynamics continue to thrive post-independence.

As voices of resistance against oppressive hegemonic forces, these narratives constantly reimagine the Guinean nation by acknowledging cultural hybridity and ethnic diversity as markers of nationhood. This inclusive model embraces both Hispanic and African heritages, even when it highlights the tensions prevalent between them. Here, the notion of national culture is continuously being interrogated and reformulated to reflect Guinea's cultural diversity in response to the legacy of Nguemism. In Donato Ndongo's novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, the narrator not only embraces his hybridity in the context of the aggressive Africanization campaign, but he refuses to relinquish it in order to become part of Nguema's nation. In *El párroco de Niefang*, too, this notion of cultural identity becomes even more complicated as Father Gabriel struggles to define what his beliefs are in the transition period following the fall of Nguema.

In summary, Equatorial Guinean literature often rehashes four specific periods: the pre-colonial, the colonial, the period of independence and the post- Nguema era. The postcolonial narrative's constant interrogation of history indicates the need to reconfigure the

colonial archive from which the country's history and identity have been projected (Sampedro- Vizcaya 251-55). Similarly, within postcolonial studies, discussions of history as a site of representation is a crucial one. In this light, the novels that I will study revise, denounce, and essentially write against nguemist histories, which has silenced its citizens' experiences. These novels move beyond their role as mere witnesses of the crimes committed to denounce these actions and historicize their people's collective experiences.

This chapter has outlined some of the significant themes that scholarly literature on the postcolonial novels of Equatorial Guinea have studied. As the literature review shows, the question of national identity remains central to the various discussions of these texts. However, my thesis moves beyond this line of enquiry to probe the tensions within these texts as discursive resistance. As the analysis in the following chapters will show, these articulations of resistance are not unidimensional but multifaceted. They reveal the complex effects that Spanish colonialism, coupled with the post-independence dictatorship had on the people of this country. These texts primarily address their discontent with colonialism and authoritarianism and demonstrate how their legacies continue to be sources of oppression for their people.

3 CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO RESISTANCE

Postcolonial theory has made significant contributions to the study of non-Western works of literature. Due to the quantity of scholarship available and its interdisciplinary nature, it facilitates several thematic engagements with the literary texts from the postcolonial world. Leading exponents of post-colonial theory, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their seminal book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) surmise that postcolonial literatures can be identified by their dismantling of the essentialist and stereotypical constructions of subject positions within imperialist discourses. This attitude of challenging representations of the formerly colonized, often referred to as counter-discourse, implicitly assumes a position of resistance. In line with these ideas, it is impossible to develop arguments on the literature of Equatorial Guinea without engaging with postcolonial theoretical studies due to the country's history and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the presence of an anti-colonial discourse and the continued prevalence of imperialist cultural and political institutions within the postcolonial period demand a critical approach that considers the colonial legacies and its implications in material and discursive situations.

In recent years, postcolonial studies have expanded, and this field has shifted its critiques of colonialism to consider the state of the postcolony. For Cameroonian intellectual Achille Mbembe, the postcolonial is not only characterized by its resistance or collaboration nor its transformation, but also by its ambiguous relationship with colonial power through which the successors of colonial authority unquestioningly inherited the tenets of this power (5). Postcolonial texts no longer speak exclusively to the metropole but address more immediate social and political challenges. Naomi McCleod concurs with this assertion in her

dissertation, “The Expression of Identity in Equatorial Guinean Narratives (1994 - 2007)”. She maintains that although Guinean writers focus on contemporary socio-political challenges, they are forced to filter their critique of the current regime through a colonial lens because the power paradigms established through the colonial act continues to operate post-independence.

The following chapter presents aspects of postcolonial theories relevant to my study of resistance. It will discuss the theoretical conceptions of resistance and then follow with a brief literature review on some foundational texts in the postcolonial literature of Equatorial Guinea.

3.1 Colonialism, Imperialism and Postcolonial Studies

Colonialism and imperialism have been prominent features of human history. These terms have been used interchangeably to describe situations where one country exercised dominance over a different group of people in another region. Ania Loomba defines the workings of imperialism and colonialism as “the conquest and control of people’s lands and goods” (8) and the general expansion of political and economic power underlying this conquest. The “mother country” exercised power over these conquered places either through sovereignty or indirect mechanisms of control. Colonialism, however, often required the presence of the colonizer to maintain its dominance. While direct or indirect colonialism needs to maintain colonies to survive, imperialism is capable of exerting influence in faraway regions without the active presence of colonizers (Loomba 11). Nevertheless, both actions are primarily characterized by undoing or reforming the communities that have been subjugated. Accompanying acts of colonialism and imperialism include violence, war, enslavement, and genocide. However, European travels into Asia, Africa and the Americas from the fifteenth

century onwards ushered in new and different colonial practices that impacted the globe in ways that other kinds of colonialisms did not. The establishment of capitalism in Europe fundamentally dictated the restructuring of dominated communities, often drawing the colonizers and the colonized into complex relationships. For Loomba, “colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism” (10). This phenomenon profoundly impacted both the metropolis and the colonies. Particularly, European colonialisms instigated a migratory pattern of goods, services and people, and generated encounters between different social groups across continents. In the process, it spurred a rapid growth of European capitalism and industry, but it did so through unequal economic relationships between the colonies and Europe.

These colonialisms at the onset of the nineteenth century proved that the production of knowledge was profoundly connected with the operations of power. The foundational cultural critic on this subject, Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism* (1978) examined colonial discourse and how it constructed representations of Europe’s Other in the Orient, what is referred to today as the Middle East. He argued that the production of knowledge on the East was a culturally and historically determined construct and was linked to the dynamics of Western political power. Conceptualizations of the Orient were far from objective, and the ensuing body of literature produced by Europeans during this period contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its Others. This division was vital to the creation of European culture as well as to the consolidation of a Western cultural hegemony over their faraway colonies (42-3).

Postcolonial theory developed as a reaction to colonialism, imperialism, and its legacies. It contests, subverts, rejects and negotiates representations of the formerly colonized

by the colonizer. In general terms, it is defined as “a set of questions and a style of thought which are made possible by colonialism and its aftermath, and which seek to rethink, and re-describe its enabling conditions” (Seth 214). This field is mainly concerned with analyzing the ideologies of colonialism, such as policies of assimilation imposed by the European powers in Africa and their other colonies. It is also concerned with how these European discourses of civilization, modernity and humanism justified their practices (Jefferess 5). At once a historical movement, a political movement and an intellectual activity, much of its criticism revolves around self-definition, resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism. For the most part, contemporary postcolonial theory, which has its genesis in the history of colonialism, engages social and economic tensions around the globe.

The very definition of postcolonial studies assumes a posture of contesting the discourse created by the colonial powers about the peoples, customs and geographies of their colonized subjects. The underpinnings of this theoretical framework insist on a re-representation, a re-addressing of the hegemonic rhetoric used to justify the colonial act. This framework examines literary works which contradict colonialist notions through a project of re-inscribing representations of the former colonial subject. In doing so, it seeks to reclaim the power to construct their own cultural identity. The multi-dimensional girth of this analytical structure allows for a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to literature as well as other disciplines. Indeed, the extensive theoretical contributions made within postcolonial studies permit an analysis of these readings through the theoretical lens of resistance. Resistance engages with anti-colonialism, the immediate effects of colonialism post-independence, nationalism as well as adverse material and historical situations resulting from European domination.

If colonialism and imperialism are defined as control over faraway colonies, with power emanating from a metropolitan center, then independence from these foreign powers ought to have ended colonialism and imperialism. Yet, the prevalence of neo-imperialism and neo-colonial practices, even in the absence of active colonialism, pay credence to a continuation of these phenomena. That is to say that a country may be formally independent but continues to be a neo-colony because it remains economically dependent on the ex-metropolis. This could be attributed to the mechanisms of European colonialisms from the sixteenth century onwards which dominated its subjects in various ways. As J. Jorge Klor de Alva and Mary Louise Pratt observe, one's position within the colonial hierarchy dictated one's level of exploitation. To exemplify this point, Alva explains that the creoles who led the formation of newly independent Latin American nations modelled communities based on European ideals, systems and hierarchies, which continually marginalized the indigenous communities economically and politically (Pratt 1992, Klor de Alva 1995). Given the different degrees of colonialisms, it is implausible to aggregate experiences of colonialisms and to claim a universal condition of postcoloniality for all formerly colonized communities.

However, within this field, the state of being postcolonial continues to be discussed. Debates surrounding the terminology itself, the state of being postcolonial and the temporal dimension of postcolonialism have received varied responses. In terms of its temporal dimension, Ella Shohat asks: "When exactly, then, does the postcolonial begin?" (103). As Shohat points out, the term is vague in determining a specific time in history when it begins. She further explains that this term glosses over the internal social and racial differences within many societies. She suggests here that given the different colonial relations, not all groups experienced colonialism in the same way. As such, it is difficult to indicate precisely when

colonialism began, for whom it began and ended because foreign domination was contested from a variety of perspectives by different communities who were not all oppressed in the same ways. De Alva, in turn, attempts to define the postcolonial by disentangling his definition from formal decolonization. He argues that communities that live in formerly colonized countries, and even in the colonizing country, such as African-Americans in the US, are still subject to systems of oppression put in place by colonialism. Similarly, critics of the field, such as Anne McClintock, have also interrogated the significance of the prefix 'post'. She argues that if the inequalities created by the colonial state are still prevalent within formerly colonized societies, then colonial order has not yet been dismantled (1992). Here, Loomba's intervention is insightful. She suggests that it is helpful to "think of postcolonialism as just not coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but that it should be viewed as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (16). This lens for engaging the postcolonial condition will accommodate an ample range of diasporic communities who have been displaced, as well as their strategies of resistance against colonialism, neo-imperialism and the encroachment of dominant Western cultures.

In response to amplifying the term postcolonial, Arif Dirlik cautions that the expansion of the ideological parameters of the postcolonial could conflate past and contemporary institutions. He argues that postcolonial theory's dismantling of the master narratives, which turned attention to the multiple narratives and subjectivities, has been detrimental to thinking about global capitalism and its role in the displacement and fragmentation of communities. Focusing on the ways these stories are connected will enable an understanding of the global imbalances of power (355).

Another point of critique within the term postcolonial has been the suffix, “colonial.” Even though colonialism did not inscribe itself on a *tabula rasa*, analyses of the postcolonial tend to focus on the colonial history of these societies. The continued existence of several indigenous cultures is proof that they pre-date colonialism and even survived it. As Megan Vaughan reminds critics, colonialisms do not account for the many systems of inequalities that are prevalent in once-colonized communities. Instead, this history should be read as a “minor interruption” in the continuum of history (47). Gayatri Spivak, too, warns in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak” against romanticizing pre-colonial cultures because revisiting the pre-colonial is always tinged with a history of the colonial. Thus, the pre-colonial can never be recovered in any original form. She reminds us that “nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism” (194). Another critic, Anthony Appiah, is also wary of the desire to recuperate the pre-colonial. He cautions against nativism, which is the tendency to romanticize native cultures as pristine forms. This idealization of such “pure” forms of culture, he argues, inadvertently aligns those postcolonial critics with Western critics who are nativists themselves (1991a).

Even though the term postcolonial is a hotbed of debate, it is still useful in describing and analyzing the situation of once-colonized communities. Peter Hulme surmises that in as much as postcolonialisms are different, they all refer to a “process of disengagement” from a colonial apparatus, which is pervasive (120). In view of this, imposing a single understanding of this experience would erase the differences within the postcolonial phenomenon.

3.2 What is Resistance?

In human history, wherever foreign domination has been exercised, the subjugated always reacted against this usurpation of power in overt and subtle ways. The various actions through which they manifest their displeasure has been described as resistance. Selwyn Cudjoe defines resistance as “any act or complex of acts designed to rid a people of its oppressors, be they slave masters or multinational corporations” (19). Cudjoe expands this definition of resistance by including a diachronic analysis which identifies the cultural, political and sociocultural factors that propel these acts. Barbara Harlow’s description and theoretical analysis of resistance in *Resistance Literature* draw from the work of Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafani, who defines resistance as a physical or ideological struggle against forces, be they foreign or among one’s own indigenous group (2). It aims to reject the imposition of Western systems and values through which the dominant attempts to control the destiny of the subjugated (19-20). Resistance can even be the refusal to be absorbed by the dominant forces operative in one’s environment, be they tribal, local or national (Ashcroft 19).

Postcolonial theorist, David Jefferess, in turn, defines resistance as something which “endeavours to transform the discursive and material structures of colonial power rather than simply subversion or opposition to certain aspects of these structures” (7). Political scientist, James C. Scott also extends another definition of resistance. He argues that it can equally be everyday actions through which an individual or group attains or maintains certain privileges, goods, rights, and freedoms in a system of domination in which they have little ascribed power, even if these actions do not manifest a clear political agenda (33). Resistance and acts of contestation, then, are vast and can range from armed acts of rebellion or insurgency or the oppositional gaze (hooks 116), to the desire to be included within the programming of a

sociocultural or national community.¹¹ Hence, resistance can be concerted action instigated by a social group or individual with or without a politicized agenda.

3.3 Theoretical Approaches to Resistance

From the sixteenth century onwards, a dominant feature of colonialism and subsequently imperialism was the power that it wielded to shape discourses about its subjects through colonial government papers, letters, trade documents, travelogues, fiction, and scientific literature. Other examples were artwork and paintings that depicted the subordination of the non-Western colonial subject. This authority to represent has been challenged textually by the colonized or the formerly colonized in order to reclaim their agency. Consequently, these writings inscribe themselves within a cultural resistance in that they express motives for their opposition. Postcolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o as well as Amilcar Cabral have all contemplated what constitutes effective resistance. Their works have discussed at length anti-colonial resistance, transformation as resistance and hybridity as a response to the essentializing characterization of colonized peoples. As such, a delineation of these ideas may help understand the theories of resistance with which this dissertation will be engaging.

As mentioned earlier, postcolonial works “write back to the centre” and their writings interrogate the dynamics of power between the colonizer and the colonized (Ashcroft et al. 1989). These texts formulate a counter-discourse that fundamentally questions the assumption

¹¹ The “oppositional gaze” was a term coined by bell hooks in her book, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992). She defines the oppositional gaze in relation to African- American history. At a time when Black slaves were forbidden to look back at their white masters, black defiance of this convention was symbolized by gazing back at the oppressor (hooks 116). The oppositional gaze then encompasses a variety of ways of looking that can be decoded as resistance to white dominance.

of the universality of canonical Western texts. In Africa, one of the earliest textual responses to imperialism was Negritude.¹² It flourished in the 1930s mainly among Africans and people of the Caribbean of African descent who were studying in European metropolises. Negritude sought to dignify the black individual and his civilization by celebrating the image of him that imperial representation and colonialism had vilified and attempted to suppress. Among the next generation of scholars, Negritude garnered much criticism mainly for its essentializing discourse on black cultures and its peoples in the face of its ample diversity. Nevertheless, its principal achievement is that this literary model marked a departure from the imperialist mode of literary representation and interpretation and attempted to establish a consistent model for evaluating the literature emanating from the African continent and its diaspora.

The writings of Martinican psychologist, Frantz Fanon, have been a springboard for resistance movements, both on the continent and within the African diaspora. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), he examines Negritude thought and its interrogation of European colonial discourse. In this text, Fanon maps out the psychological, political and social terrain common to all black people colonized by Europe. His psychoanalytic discussion exposed the dichotomies enacted by Western colonial discourses and proposed emancipation through the construction of liberating narratives. This proposal recognized the power that European colonialist literature held in shaping the identity of those colonized. In Fanon's formulation

¹² Negritude is a term coined by the activist and poet Leopold Sedar Senghor, who first used it in 1934. It has been defined as the awareness of being black, a taking charge of one's destiny as a black man, of one's history and culture. It also refers to attempts to rediscover, promote and valorize African culture. Negritude emerged as a counter-discourse to Western imperialism and rigorously questioned the values and codes of European civilization within the context of colonialism, while it championed the totality of civilizing values of the black community around the world (Harrison 193). Critics such as Fanon have criticized this ideology for its essentialization of black communities around the globe and its dependency on the dualism inherent within the colonial paradigm (*The Wretched of the Earth* 170-1; 257-8).

of decolonizing strategies, the artist takes on the significant role of articulating a resistance which harnesses the collective sentiments of his people against foreign oppression. Literature then, in Fanon's assertion, whether oral or written, can be instrumentalized in the fight against colonialism.

The Wretched of the Earth (2004) is arguably Fanon's most vocal work on decolonization for its clamor for the urgent need to reclaim an African identity. In this text, he describes decolonization as a historical process through which the formerly colonized shirk off the vestiges of the colonizer's sociological and psychological influence at all levels of national life (31-32). According to Ben Etherington, in this text, Fanon provides "an index of decolonizing movements and captures the general aspiration to decolonize among the Third World" (151). While Fanon's analysis recognized "Blackness" at the heart of the oppression within colonialism, it simultaneously emphasized the need to acknowledge the economic and political realities which impel the assertion of racial difference.

Fanon's analysis also points out the violent cultural assimilation under colonialism and reveals its emasculating effects on the native male population. In examining the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Macías Nguema regime depicted in Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad*, this text reveals some of the pitfalls of the discourse on nationalizing culture against which Fanon warns. He cautions that the nationalist bourgeoisie stands to perpetuate the vertical systems of oppression inherited from the colonial system. As my examination of the three novels will demonstrate, the independence administration's one-dimensional understanding and ethnocentric approach to anti-imperialism merely complicated the political chaos which European colonization had already created. Furthermore, the political, social and economic structures that ensured the exploitation of the

masses were not dismantled but merely changed hands. In this way, Nguema reinforced the structures of colonial power, entrenching it more profoundly within the socio-political structures of the new nation.

Resistance has also been conceptualized in less overt terms. In this arena, Homi Bhabha's intervention revolves around his theories on mimicry as a form of resistance. He describes colonial mimicry as a system that depends upon differences between the colonizer and the colonized to function. Bhabha argues that these are colonial strategies that work to consolidate power by inducing its subjects to imitate the forms and values of the dominant culture. He points out that this strategy is doomed to failure because it will always require the subordinated to retain a certain level of difference from the dominant to preserve the structures of discrimination necessary for the economic exploitation of the colonized (126-131). Bhabha's contributions move beyond the analysis of colonialist assimilationist policies and colonial relations to explore resistance of the colonized through the agency of the colonized. His works propose a model that is opposed to the violent mobilization against colonial power submitted by Fanon. Bhabha offers a "transitive" mode of subaltern resistance. This refers to strategic reversal of the process of domination, which turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. In this way, the colonized is empowered to return and challenge the gaze of the colonizer. The colonized can refuse to return the colonizer's gaze as a way of destabilizing the power relations within this relationship. Bhabha highlights that the refusal of the colonized to satisfy the colonizer's "narrative demand" for recognition is always a valid act of political as well as psychic resistance (Gilbert-Moore et al. 35).

3.4 Anti-Colonial Resistance

Challenging colonial authority among the colonized was not done under a uniform motive. Acts of resistance during the European conquest of Africa and under colonialism were complex because of the different motivations of the various groups who wanted to maintain their autonomy. In many confrontations against the Western conquest, the leaders of African ethnic nations primarily fought to defend their social and political interests. Within this context, this opposition was not construed in terms of black African / white European binaries. A scholar of African history, Benjamin Talton, explains that the resistance of African nation-states against European encroachment was shaped by their local contexts as well as the global networks of political activism during the period between the two World Wars (315). Rivalries between African nation-states and European-African power dynamics were at the heart of these military confrontations. Given these diverse motives, it becomes implausible to aggregate all acts of resistance as an aggressive campaign against opposing forces. Resistance for some groups meant collaboration with European colonial administrations in order to limit their control, while for others, it was overtly challenging these dominant forces through violent warfare.

However, the fight against Western domination has not always been through physical violence. It has also meant appropriating European cultural elements, such as the novel and other kinds of writings to challenge the European right to rule. Edward Said puts forth that colonial literature while asserting Europe's image, produced and managed the identity of the colonized. Images of the subjugated reinforced a Western cultural bias and justified the colonial project. Therefore, anti-colonial struggles had to create culturally powerful images of the colonized people, which served as cohesive rhetoric to challenge their subjugation on

all fronts. Such a strategy suggests a privileging of the text as an important means of challenging foreign rule. Consequently, these attitudes informed the various nationalisms that sprung across non-Western territories once subsumed under European empires. Benedict Anderson, in his influential discussion in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), argues that the anti-colonial nationalism which sprung up among the colonized depended on European and American models which were “imagined” and had been passed down through the imperialist legacy of European languages (113). Thus, anti-colonial nationalism is shaped by European political and intellectual history, which makes this a “derivative discourse” dependent on the colonizer's gift of language and ideas (Loomba 158).

However, Partha Chatterjee contends that nationalism was not merely a derivative discourse. Far from being an imitative model, one of its strong points was to challenge authority on the basis of cultural differences. Within Indian nationalist histories, he distinguishes between nationalism that challenged British political power and that which asserted cultural autonomy. Although he credits political nationalism as a derivative discourse, he argues that cultural nationalism sought to “fashion a modern national culture that is non-Western” (6). For him, the stringent emphasis on the political aspect of nationalism glossed over the various ways in which colonized peoples asserted their cultural autonomy even while their lands remained under foreign political power. He argues that through literature and the arts, Bengali intellectuals sought to create aesthetic spaces that were distinctively Indian, positioning the domain of culture as private, barring Western cultural influence (7).

Chatterjee's discussion reveals that culture is a crucially important site of contention within anti-colonial struggles. In positioning culture as a private entity, its instrumentality is reconfigured for both people on either side of the colonial divide. Similarly, Amilcar Cabral argues that the validation of culture as a field of contention within the anti-colonial struggle was a pre-requisite to national liberation. He equates colonialism to the destruction of indigenous African cultures and locates the socio-political cohesion necessary for combatting colonialism within a people's shared culture. He states that:

The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated. Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of the relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies. Ignorance of this fact may explain the failure of several attempts at foreign domination- as well as the failure of some national liberation movements. (4)

Cabral conceptualized the struggle for national liberation as an act of culture. For him, political independence was meaningless unless it was tied to the cultural emancipation of the colonized. Nevertheless, Cabral is not quick to condemn all legacies of colonialism. Instead, he proposed appropriating and blending European and indigenous elements towards the consolidation of national culture. Zeyad el Nabolsy argues that Cabral's approach to cultural liberation is modernist (6) in that his theories do not look to the recuperation of the native past but is more future-oriented. Cabral's approach to culture, in opposition to that of the Bengali

intellectuals described by Chatterjee, constructs culture as an entity that is being transformed rather than a private institution regulated by purist notions under the constant threat of Western influence.

Discussions of the significance of culture, specifically in its manifestation within the home illuminates the centrality of gender to nationalist discourses in the colonized world. Anne McClintock observes that even for Frantz Fanon, both sides of the colonial divide are male, and the struggle to decolonize is waged over the territoriality of the domestic space (361). Fanon illustrates in “Algeria Unveiled” that the female body, which symbolizes native culture, becomes a site of contention between the colonial administration, which seeks to liberate the oppressed native woman and the native who challenges this right. Nationalisms, thus, are gendered in that the conceptualization of the nation aligned solely with a masculine perspective. Consequently, the aspirations and frustrations of the country are identified with the male figure. Within this discourse, the female is constructed as a symbolic bearer of the nation but denied any national agency. Nationalisms thus established relations to political power, which depended on powerful constructions of gender and which ironically, excluded females from any direct relationship with the state.

Anti-colonial struggles have engendered various responses among the colonized and those formerly colonized, and although their approaches differ in dealing with colonialism, they highlight the complexities emanating from this contact with Europe. Nationalisms themselves prove to be a site of multiple contentions. First, the idea of a national culture, which is vital to the creation of national identity, glosses over the pre-existing cultural diversity within the national community. Nationalist constructions of a collective identity become equally as guilty as the colonial discourse of homogenizing its differences. Thus, anti-

colonial nationalisms replicate imperialist formulations by its erection of boundaries which exclude based on difference. Women become the symbolic bearers of the nation and their connection to it is restricted to the realm of domesticity. Within this framework, women must have a direct relationship with the state to be visible. It is perhaps this state of invisibility and powerlessness that motivated the female character Ada, the paramilitary officer, who will be discussed in Chapter Five. Her appearance in the novel reveals how nguemist rhetoric of nationalism subsumes gender. In *Los poderes de la tempestad*, Ada only becomes a visible agent of the government when she embodies the traits of the dictator.

3.5 Transformation as Resistance

Ashcroft points out that the theme of transformation as resistance has garnered little attention as it is not considered an overtly direct form of contestation. Colonial discourse evokes dichotomies such as the colonizer/colonized, European/non-European, black/white binaries which confine acts of opposition solely within manifestations of physical violence. He argues that the prevailing rhetoric of anti-colonialism was reductive as it implied that there was only one war colonized societies were waging, and that was the struggle against colonialism (27). The general view of colonialism as an unmitigated disaster often ignores how colonized societies adapted and appropriated imperialist culture for their purposes. Their resilience and their enormous capacity for adapting to the dominant cultural system has forced some critics to reassess the hitherto docile image of the victimization of colonized societies.

Non-overt forms of rejecting this binarity embedded in daily life constitute a kind of opposition to the hegemonic discourse of colonialism as the colonial experience was far from being an essentialist experience. Thus, the capacity of these communities to imbibe the dominant culture without being absorbed by it and to appropriate its discourse of modernity

as a signifier of postcolonial identity constitutes a kind of non- violent resistance. For instance, Mbomio Bacheng's *El párroco de Niefang* exemplifies the appropriation of a Catholic religious discourse as a signifier of a society that had not distanced itself from its African roots but had adopted the Catholic religion as a marker of postcolonial identity. This position rejects the so-called Africanizing nationalist discourse imposed on the different ethnicities during the post-independence dictatorship.

Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry and ambivalence are perhaps one of the earliest to point to the transmuted or ambivalent nature of the colonized subject when s/he has come under the tutelage of the Western civilizing tradition. Bhabha argues that mimicry works to consolidate power by inducing its subjects to imitate the forms and values of the dominant culture. He also points out that this strategy is doomed to failure because it will always require the subordinated to retain a certain level of difference from the dominant to preserve the structures of discrimination necessary for the economic exploitation of the colonized (126-131). Underlying Bhabha's critique is the notion that the cultural state of the colonized subject, once dominated and forced to assimilate European ideals, is lost. Ashcroft observes:

The activity of transformation gives us a different way of looking at what Bhabha calls the ambivalence of colonial discourse. For rather than a kind of flaw in the operation of colonial discourse, ... ambivalence may be regarded as a much more active feature of post-colonial subjectivity. It may be seen to be the *ambivalent* or 'two-powered' sign of the capacity of the colonized to 'imitate' transformatively, to take the image of the colonial model and use it in the process of resistance, the process of self-empowerment. Ambivalence is ... the sign of the agency of the colonized- the two-way gaze, the dual-orientation, the ability to appropriate colonial technology without

being absorbed by it- which disrupts the monologic impetus of the colonizing process.
(22-23)

Thus, mimicry informs the point of departure for the transformational model in that the subject takes hold of imperial technology and ideas and makes them work for his or her benefit. The notion of “writing back” appropriates the discursive tools of imperialism, history and literature, to rework postcolonial texts. However, counter-discursivity becomes transformational only when it challenges our view of cultural possibilities (35). For example, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* reads as a response to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in that it exposes the complexities within Umofian culture with all its ambivalence, thereby rejecting the stereotyping of African cultures based on the Western perspective. In the same vein, Ndongu’s novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, also adopts a non-binary perspective by calling for the consideration of the colonial legacy as a transformational instrument for the Guinean national community. Transformation, although it employs the counter-discursive, rejects its binary oppositionality in favour of interrogating both traditional and colonial structures that perpetuate structural inequalities. It demands a reordering of both colonial hierarchical and traditional patriarchal norms that continue to marginalize its members.

3.6 Appropriating European Languages

Before contact with Europe, Africa has always been a linguistically rich and diverse mosaic. However, under colonial administration, Western languages such as English, French, Portuguese and Spanish were used as mediums of formal education. Consequently, their uses in these ways profoundly affected how various African and Western languages were used on the continent. Even after many countries attained independence, Western languages of colonial administration continued to command prestige as official and co-official languages

in the governance of many communities. This linguistic state of affairs underlines the complicated relations between the former colony and ex- metropolis. This is reflected within the postcolonial literature and critics have attempted to ascertain what should be the appropriate language for African literatures. Perhaps the conference on African Literatures of English Expression held in Makerere University, Uganda in 1962 best exemplifies this debate. At this conference, a consensus could not be reached over the place European languages ought to occupy in the creation of African literature. While some arguments point to the transformative capacity within these languages to depict and transmit African realities and to serve as a common linguistic denominator among Africans, others view the use of European languages as a continued dependency on European culture.

Obiajunwa Wali in “The Dead-end of African Literature” opposes the uncritical acceptance of European languages by educated Africans as the inevitable medium for writing. For him, writing in European languages does not inscribe the works of African writers within English or French works of literature, and neither does it advance African literatures and cultures. As such, it is bound to lead to a dead-end (333). He argues that these writer’s works do not support African languages with much-needed literature that could complement linguistic studies and elevate their uses within national or regional communities. He views this affinity of African writers with Western languages as a failure of African cultural emancipation. For him, writing in one’s native language is critical for the development of a real African sensibility (334).

Similarly, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in *Decolonizing the Mind* assesses the medium of creative expression in view of the decolonization agenda. He primarily questions what he expresses as the “fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English” within African

literature and, by extension, other languages such as French and Portuguese. He argues that through the humanist tradition, the British colonial curriculum elevated the colonial language of English as the language of formal education and modernity. In the process, this system sidelined the local African languages and alienated the Kenyan from his culture. For Ngugi, the linguistic strategy of appropriation, whereby the author deconstructs the European language as a strategy of subversion, is superficial. He claims that deconstructionist or reconstructionist linguistic approaches to works of literature are constrictive, and within such a colonialist framework, the African writer cannot honestly resist (1-33).

Ngugi's consideration of how the colonial project sidelined African languages, excluding them from evolving within the context of modernization, is illuminating. The dismissal of African languages from colonial systems of education truncated its possibilities of linguistic evolution through which it could express complex modern realities and thought. Ngugi seems to suggest here that the onus rests on writers to use their native languages to express those realities and to transmit the values, histories and aesthetics of African cultures, instead of merely translating them. For him, African writers who show a strong affinity for creative expression in European languages are still subjugated and, at the cultural level, not entirely emancipated from colonial literary culture.

The colonial contact and how it foisted the system of writing as a mode of communication not only controls the medium of communication but also what can be communicated (Ashcroft et al. 79 -81). Literacy, while it destroyed the immediacy of personal experience and the totalizing nature of oral cultures, led to the development of fixed narratives, both historical and literary. For many post-colonial writers, the seizing of the imperial mode of communication -the text- becomes a site for the abrogation and

appropriation of the imperial language and culture to represent themselves and their experiences. The colonial contact highlighted the vulnerability of oral cultures faced with the domination of literacy under colonialism.

On the opposing end of this debate, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe believes that although the English Language was a hegemonic medium of expression and an inherited language for most Africans, it retained the ability to interpret a variety of African contexts and could carry the weight of his African experiences (27-30). Achebe seems to suggest here that postcolonial texts resist the universality of the signs and codes of communication inherent within the imperial language and use their narratives to rupture these writing conventions by inscribing their native traditional symbols and codes.

Ashcroft et al. (1989) underline how postcolonial African writers, reformulate and appropriate European languages within their texts as an act of resistance. These writers' subversion consists of "remoulding the language to new usages" and this act marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege (34). They write: "Whether written from monoglossic, diglossic or polyglossic cultures, post-colonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of 'English' by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood" (51). Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* inscribes itself within the English canon because of its ability to enter English literature and to appropriate the dominant tool of imperial representation, the English novel, to represent the complexities of the protagonist and his community vividly (Ashcroft 2001). Achebe sees the imperial language as a kind of capital, and on these grounds, he refutes Ngugi's claims of the passivity of the colonized in accepting a European worldview. For Achebe, the use of European languages as

the language of African fiction is not an agent of oppression but rather a vehicle that has facilitated cohesion and fruitful literary exchanges.

Many formerly colonized countries in Africa opted to retain European colonial languages of administration as their official languages. When Equatorial Guinea too attained independence in 1968, it maintained Spanish as the official language of national communication and official administration. This decision was rescinded shortly after the inauguration of the Macías Nguema regime and the subsequent breakdown of diplomatic relations between Spain and Guinea. This administration imposed the Fang language at various levels of socio-political life and, in the years that followed, the systematic persecution of intellectuals made any association with Spain dangerous for Guineans living under this regime.

In the 1991 version of its constitution, Equatorial Guinea declared Spanish as its official language once again. In Fernando Po, the Spanish language competes with Pidgin English or *pichinglis* as the preferred vehicle of inter-ethnic communication while on the continental region, Spanish is the preferred language of interaction between the different ethnicities (Lipski 117-8) and it is also the language in which most of the literature of Equatorial Guinea is written. First, there is the impracticability of using the native languages of Equatorial Guinea to disseminate literature. Given that ethnic languages have not been the object of sustained language policy at the administrative levels of government, very few people are literate in their native languages. Secondly, the discovery of petroleum in Equatorial Guinea has attracted exploitation of this resource from the United States and France. Through its reliance on this expatriate labor force, this situation has exposed the Guinean linguistic panorama to encroachment by French and English. Thirdly, Equatorial

Guinea's incorporation into the CFA money zone in the late 1980s has also accelerated the uses of languages like French and pidgin English within the country. Indeed, it is the prevalence of these opposing factors that has incited a reaffirmation of Spanish as a marker of national identity among Equatorial Guineans.

The use of Spanish as a medium of communication recalls a particularly difficult period in the country's history, where the use of the Spanish language was punishable. During this period, Nguema attempted to recondition the nation back to its African roots through an aggressive Africanization campaign which demonized everything European. Spanish was viewed by this administration as a link to the neo-imperialist agenda of their former colonizers and often carried sentences of imprisonment and forced labor. Given this historical antecedent, the choice by Equatoguinean authors to use the Spanish language cannot be reduced to links with a foreign oppressor. It can be read as the means of exercising their freedom of speech, especially for those who saw these freedoms undermined in the former regime (Odartey-Wellington 165-8).

Among Guinean writers, the question of using the Spanish language as a vehicle of literature produces ambivalent reactions. Postcolonial theorist, Natalia Álvarez Méndez, in *Palabras desencadenadas: aproximación a la teoría literaria postcolonial y a la escritura hispano-negroafricana* explains that generally, Guinean authors do not perceive the Spanish language as a foreign, borrowed or stolen entity. For this reason, they are not uneasy with this language's ability to transmit their African identity (120). She argues that although Equatorial Guinea is a multi-ethnic country, these writers engage in the act of resistance through their appropriation of the Spanish language as a vehicle of cultural expression and inter-ethnic communication. Through this act, the Spanish language is deterritorialized, employed in a

textual resistance and is further enriched through the inter-linguistic interferences with other African languages (124). Through the revalorization of the local vernacular, it becomes evident that the writing project no longer addresses the metropole alone but directs its discourse at its fellow citizens.

3.7 Limitations within Postcolonial Theories of Resistance

Despite its immense contributions to analyzing and understanding narratives from non-Western regions, postcolonial theories of resistance are not without criticisms. The shortcomings within this framework have tended to revolve around the terminology of post-colonialism itself, and its capacity to truly reflect and inscribe the continuities and discontinuities of power dynamics within neo-colonialist relations post-independence. McClintock points out that the term “post-colonialism” is “haunted by the figure of the linear development that it set out to dismantle” (254). She argues that the diverse cultures of the world are not positively marked by what distinguishes them but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time. Secondly, the theoretical framework’s constant fixture of the masculine tends to obscure the different forms of colonialization that men and women both experience (253-266).

The overwhelming attention to the masculine has required a re-orientation of the male colonizer/male colonized binary to explore how the colonial legacy continues to influence the institutionalization of gendered inequality post-independence (Lewis and Mills xvi). Jefferess's analysis of the complex nexus of power relations and the effect on the black female body in Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* point to one of the central problems in readings of female resistance as apolitical. In his assessment, the bodies of colonized women are the site where traditional patriarchy and colonial power is exerted. However, various

readings tend to interpret this rebellion as one aimed against traditional patriarchy and colonial power and conceptualize it as resistance which lacks a specific political or social agenda and these views in effect depoliticize female resistance (58).

Benita Parry also remarks that one of the principal limitations within this theoretical approach is that this reverse discourse tends to trap its rhetoric within the same dichotomies created by imperialism. Within such a framework, the rhetoric formulated by the formerly colonized through which they articulate their identity is concerned with establishing difference. She holds that “nativism” within discourses of decolonization addresses the empowering effects of constructing identity and cherishing original forms and ought not to revive pre-colonial cultures (179).

3.8 Resistance Literature

The theoretical frameworks explained above serve as models for understanding many postcolonial literatures which oppose the dominant discourses arising from their socio-political conditions. In the arena of resistance, literature tends to fulfill a cultural role because it is imbued with the capacity to transform political and social realities. The cultural dimension inherent within literature taps into collective social experiences and positions it to represent and articulate social structures and sentiments. Barbara Harlowe, a leading voice on conceptualizations of resistance, identifies that literature can be an arena for political struggles at the ideological level and creates spaces for the mobilization of armed struggle (2).

However, resistance itself cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the power structures that shape its emergence. The sociologist J. M. Barbalet signals that the relationship between resistance and power by signaling that resistance is the exercise of “those

factors which in limiting the exercise of power contribute to the outcome of the power relationship” (532). As a result, resistance responds to situations where dominance and hegemony are exerted. While domination refers to physical acts of coercion, it also includes more subtle forms such as a cultural or political hegemony designed to control the subjugated. This can also include indoctrination, propaganda, acculturation or alienation through education or other rituals and social or political systems. Literature that rejects, opposes or limits the encroachment of these institutions through a variety of strategies can be called resistance literature.

The vastness of this phenomenon makes it difficult to aggregate all its characteristics into a few words. However, one aspect relevant to the discussion of resistance in this thesis is that articulated by Harlowe. She points out that within resistance writing, the author demands a politicization of interpretation and artistic production:

Narrative, unlike poetry perhaps, provides a more developed historical analysis of the circumstances of economic, political, and cultural domination and repression and through that analysis raises a systematic and concerted challenge to the imposed chronology of what Frederic Jameson has called “Master narratives,” ideological paradigms which contain within their plots a predetermined ending. The use by Third World resistance writers of the novel form as it has developed within the Western literary tradition both appropriates and challenges the historical and historicizing presuppositions, the narrative conclusions, implicated within the Western tradition and its development. (78)

Thus, within the project of resistance writing, the texts seek “different historical endings,” and they become implicit in its portrayal of the problematics of the political and social conditions. Ingrained in this reading practice is the demand that these texts place on their readers through their historical references (79-80). She holds that through its engagement with the past, the experimentation within resistance writing requires a historical and ideological awareness on the part of readers (96). Resistance writing thus creates spaces within literature that oppose the political and social structures of oppression. It moves beyond social protest which condemns the ills in a community to amplify muted voices especially within and after a period of censorship.

4 CHAPTER 4: THE PAST IS PRESENT: COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND NGUEMISM IN *EL PÁRROCO DE NIEFANG*

4.1 Colonial Discourse and Nguemism in *El párroco de Niefang*

Religion played a fundamental role in the colonialism of Equatorial Guinea. Missionary work during this period established formal education, the healthcare system and the Catholic religion and also sought to eradicate native religions, customs and practices which it considered uncivilized or barbaric. Within this colonial apparatus, religion became the principal instrument of Hispanicization and missionary activities enabled the Spanish administration to consolidate its conquest of Spanish Guinea. After independence, Guinea's first president, Macías Nguema cut all ties with Spain. In a sanguinary anti-neo-colonialist campaign, his regime staged a systemic persecution of the clergy with the intention of eliminating Spanish cultural hegemony. However, in the process, Nguemism reinforced the political and discursive structures of colonial power, persecuting Guineans who still adhered to Catholicism, and making the first presidency a mere continuation of the country's long history of institutionalizing religious suppression.

Given its history, the advent of Catholicism in Guinea is heavily tied to its political subjection to Spain. However, the question of religion in Guinea, its links to colonial discourse and how colonialism fostered the assimilation of Spanish culture among Guineans has received little attention. Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng's novel, *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) describes the religious mores of the Guinean people and shows an engagement with the colonial and nguemist powers that have shaped Guinean identity. Bacheng, who was born in

Niefang in 1956 under Spanish colonialism, also lived through the Nguema regime (1968-1979) and witnessed first-hand the atrocities committed by this sanguinary leader. As a result of these experiences, the Spanish colonial legacy and Nguemism feature prominently in thematic considerations of his works.

This chapter argues that *El párroco de Niefang* politicizes a narrative about the religious experiences of Father Gabriel, the protagonist, and the people of Niefang in a two-fold expression of resistance that results in a pursuit of freedom from hegemonic conceptualizations of the experiences of Guineans under colonialism. First, this novel uses the psychological drama of the protagonist to subvert colonial discourse. Father Gabriel's experiences, in effect, counter Iberian humanitarian claims of civilizing its African subjects to reveal how Western religious education has an alienating effect on the formerly colonized subject and jeopardizes in its aftermath the formerly colonized subject's ability to lead post-independence. This novel overturns this discourse further challenging late imperial perceptions of Guineans as a Christianized people who had been divested of their African cultures. *El párroco de Niefang*'s representation of the collective identity of this township and its peoples opposes this homogenized view by demonstrating that while Guineans have adopted Christianity, African culture, ancestral values and customs still formed the basis of Guinea's hybrid culture. In doing so, the text writes against the colonial archives and positions itself as a greater authority to represent the people of Guinea in a more objective light.

In the novel's second articulation of resistance, this text breaks the long silence on the crimes that Nguema and his soldiers committed against Guineans during his tenure. This is especially significant because in the post-Nguema era, the Obiang administration is revising the historical narrative of the post-independence period to point to a collective victimization

under Nguema.¹³ *El párroco de Niefang* represents a resistance to forgetting the physical and psychological abuse that Nguemism brought onto Guinean citizens. It historicizes those experiences that the current regime has erased or silenced and denounces Nguema's government for its violations of the people's rights.

4.1.1 The Author

Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng was born in Bisobinam-Somo in the Niefang district of Río Muni in 1956. Born under Spanish colonialism, he lived in the country during Nguema's tenure, but was forced to flee after the fall of the despot. Currently, he resides in exile in Europe from where he published his first novel, *El párroco de Niefang*.

Bacheng completed his preliminary education at the Escuela Nacional Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra in Bata. While he was still a student, he was arrested by Nguema's soldiers on March 24, 1978 and incarcerated until after the "golpe de libertad," which ended Nguema's dictatorship in 1979. While in prison, he joined hundreds of other Guineans who were forced to work on the cocoa plantations of the dictator (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom 456-7). Of all the authors whose works have been studied, Bacheng is the only one who personally suffered the Nguemism's attacks. As a result, the recollections of the time that he presents in his novel, *El párroco de Niefang*, although fiction, represent the regime's interactions with the people of Niefang with some veracity. Upon his release, Bacheng

¹³ The Obiang administration is considered by many critics as a mere continuation of the Nguema regime because of its close links with its predecessor. Teodoro Obiang was the Nguema's nephew and served during his uncle's tenure as the Head of the Armed Forces and director of the notorious Black Beach Prison. His regime too has been described as the second nguemist dictatorship, "la dictature Esangui número 2" (Liniger-Goumaz 164) as the government continues to wield a strong grip on the people through the implementation of repressive practices and policies, making the nation a patrimony state of the dictator's clan (Bolekia Boleká 156).

witnessed the transition from Guinea's first government to the Obiang regime, which overthrew Macías. As the author himself notes in the prologue, the transition period, estimated to be around the months following the "golpe de libertad" in 1979, was a time of a profound national crisis which was visible at various levels; economic, political and social. Some of the concerns of the citizenry during period are presented in the novel *El párroco de Niefang*.

A few years after his release, he travelled to France to pursue higher education. When he completed these studies in 1988, he returned to Malabo, where he remained until 1990 but political circumstances forced him again to leave for France and then later Switzerland (Lewis 157). As scholars of Guinean history have observed, the Obiang government, which promised to restore democracy to the nation, is no more than a perpetuation of Nguema's policies and continues to wield its iron grip over its citizens. In addition to writing three other novels, he has also published several poems and articles. Because of the political nature of his exile, his works revolve around the migrant experiences of Africans in the diaspora. His writings also discuss the social and political conditions that continue to plague Equatorial Guinea as a postcolonial nation-state. Altogether, his literary output shows a connection, and a genesis even, from Africa, but also an engagement with storytelling which considers trans territorial challenges for Guineans away from home.

4.2 *El párroco de Niefang*

El párroco de Niefang was published in 1996. It is a fiction that fuses literary creativity with significant historical events of this transition period as well as the author's own personal life. It recounts the experiences of Father Gabriel and the parishioners in the town of Niefang and its surrounding areas. Father Gabriel, a Guinean priest is released from Blavis prison when Nguema's government is overthrown. However, while in prison, Gabriel had begun to question

his Catholic faith, and this internal conflict continues after his release and he contemplates abandoning his vocation as a priest. Meanwhile, the Niefang community interpret the priest's return to the parish as a triumph for the Catholic Church in Equatorial Guinea because Macías persecuted Christians. In the euphoria of Gabriel's return alive from prison, despite his protests, Gabriel is informed that the Vatican is planning his beatification. As Father Gabriel attempts to resume his daily sacerdotal duties, his interactions with the people of Niefang awaken him to how culturally alienated he was from the communities he had been serving. The people of Niefang inhabit a dual system of religion. They honour Fang social and cultural traditions, and they simultaneously embrace the Catholic faith. Father Gabriel often remembers living under Nguema's dictatorship during which the regime committed a long list of human right violations, frequently targeting adherents of the Catholic religion or anyone who showed an affinity towards European culture. In a significant episode in the novel, the protagonist witnesses a *mibili*¹⁴ ceremony. During this function, the spirit of his friend, Patricio who did not survive his incarceration speaks to Gabriel through a medium, Ndong. These experiences awaken him to a Fang religious worldview he had only heard about but never experienced. Eventually, he comes to accept both belief systems as a part of his identity.

In *El párroco de Niefang*, there is a profound reflection on identity. This articulation of Guinean identity, both personal and collective, is presented as hybrid. More importantly, it conceptualizes Guinean identity free from the dominant forces of colonialism and Nguemism. In its break away from these powers, the text presents a complex picture of the effects of colonialism. While colonialism did not completely strip most Guineans of their indigenous

¹⁴ *Mbili* is a Fang religious practice which involves the invocation of the spirit of the dead who comes to inhabit the body of a living person, its medium for a brief period. In this novel, the narrator describes this as “la ciencia de comunicación con los muertos” (37).

religions, it impacted the protagonist differently, even to the point of culturally alienating him from his own people. This perspective on the implications of colonialism attempts to provide a balanced account of how colonialism can impact the same members of a community differently. Bacheng's text also reveals a concern with remembering how Guineans suffered under Macías. As the nation ushered in a new era, questions of accountability for the crimes Macías and his allies committed remain unanswered. Frequently, the text recalls the atrocities and abuses that opponents and suspected detractors of this regime endured. These are experiences which — after years of invisibility, silence, erasure and repression — are demanding to be heard.

4.3 Politicizing Religious Discourse

El párroco de Niefang's engagement with the discursive paradigms of Western power and *Nguemism* essentially politicizes a narrative about religion. From the colonial administration to the post-independence government, this novel demonstrates how the formation of Guinea's social identity has always been influenced by the interests of those in power. Father Gabriel's release from prison is interpreted as a triumph for the Catholic church in Guinea because their political and social significance was diminished considerably by the independence administration. As Father Gabriel contemplates abandoning his priestly vocation, the Church also hopes to recuperate some measure of the influence it once held. The special envoy from the Vatican expresses the Church's triumph over Macías: “- Puedo decir hoy, con orgullo en mi espíritu y alegría en mi corazón, que la Iglesia de Guinea ha vuelto a reunir en su seno al rebaño que le confió el Señor: la fe sigue viva en Guinea” (29).

The envoy's words not only echo a spiritual revival but link the Catholic Church to its long history of exercising cultural and even political power in these regions. According to Fra

Baltasar Molinero, a leading critic of Guinean literature, the Catholic church identified with colonialism's imposition of a vertical social structure and supported it in its propagation of colonial power. He argues that:

Para ser aceptado en la Iglesia, había que obedecer al poder colonial, que así resultaba legitimado y legitimante...Al mismo tiempo, la Iglesia y las autoridades estaban unidas en el esfuerzo de desposeer la autoridad, poder y legitimidad de a los jefes tribales que no aceptaran el nuevo orden traído desde fuera. Para ello, desde una concepción vertical de lo religioso, la Iglesia medraba mientras bendecía el poder político basado en la jerarquía y las relaciones de desigualdad. (118-9)

Therefore, the foundation of Catholicism in Guinea is tied to Western hegemonic power structures. As *El párroco de Niefang* shows, this power has diminished and the Church attempts to recuperate at the very least, its cultural significance devoid of its former political power. Gabriel's colleague, who is also a priest, Father Matanga conceives of this power in terms of cultural and social capital: "La confesión de gran hombre en el lecho de la muerte aumenta sobremanera el poder de los religiosos. El poder sacerdotal tenía que extenderse, solía decir Matanga; y la luz de Cristo conquistar aquel barrio donde todos aspiraban a la dominación y a la posesión" (42).

Throughout the novel, Equatorial Guinea's independence from Spain in 1968 is used as a synonym for the destruction of its social, cultural and its political institutions and the narrator formulates the nation's independence as the genesis of its moral decline. Post-independence, relations between the ex-colony and the metropolis deteriorated quickly. Fearing a neo-colonialist attack, Macías Nguema drove an anti-colonialism campaign to rid

the country of the legacies of Spain. In Nguema's view, the church was perpetuating Western control because its mission in Equatorial Guinea had been to ensure the country's subjugation to Spain. Nguema staged a systematic persecution of the clergy, often accusing them as detractors of his regime. It has been argued that Nguemism simply appropriated the discriminatory and economically exploitative apparatus of the colonial regime in its administration of Equatorial Guinea (Sá 112). His government destroyed what little progress the colony had made under the Spanish. The narrator observes that: "La victoria de Macías y su equipo fue un drama social y una tragedia en el escenario guineano: la retirada de las sociedades comerciales del país, el cierre de las escuelas y los repetidos errores políticos dieron al traste con los progresos que se habían realizado antes de la independencia" (56).

As such, independence for Guineans did not translate as true freedom but instead marks the beginning of the loss of political and social rights. The departure of Spain is not considered true emancipation because the new rulers of the nation — Guineans themselves — have subjected their fellow citizens to conditions worse than those of colonialism. Within Macías' political system of terror, many citizens were recruited as forced labor for his plantations, many more who opposed or were suspected to oppose the regime were imprisoned, tortured or killed. This leader's ethnocentrism made people of non-Fang ethnicities, especially the Bubis vulnerable because they made up a higher percentage of the educated class (Baynham 67-9). Under Nguema, Equatorial Guineans lost many of their civil rights. As a result, independence is still a mirage, an aspiration that has not yet been attained:

-Ah! Si hubiéramos sido independientes, hubiéramos podido formar muchos movimientos políticos, con muchas ideas y varios hombres de valor, hubiéramos podido edificar un país próspero, con una sociedad sana y dinámica... mirad lo que

hemos llegado a ser: un país en ruinas, un mundo de pordioseros, una sociedad de corrupción ... (110)

The narrator laments Guinea's political situation as an atmosphere marked by a moral and political degeneration. In the novel, religious figures such as Gabriel are tasked with providing social and moral leadership and the protagonist falls into a crisis because he is unable to live up to these expectations. However, his lover Soledad reminds him that by virtue of his priestly vocation, he must provide the much-needed guidance in a post-colonial and post- Nguema society:

Tú y los demás sacerdotes tenéis que servir a vuestra comunidad; eso no es fácil, pero es vuestra misión. Mira a esa gente, nuestro pueblo, sufre todos los días las vejaciones del régimen, la época colonial no les dejó nada y las promesas de la independencia también se desvanecieron; hoy el pueblo guineano no tiene nada y en el fondo tampoco pide algo. (114)

Foremost critic of Guinean literature, Benita Sampedro-Vizcaya argues that the various strategies used in Guinean literature “opens doors to a profound recognition of the national past” (342). *El párroco de Niefang* concurs with this view in contemplating Guinean society through the religious experiences of its peoples to articulate the ways in which hegemonic powers continue to operate post- independence.

As Bacheng's novel shows, within Equatorial Guinea's history, religion and politics are intertwined. Therefore, analyses of religion cannot be isolated from the nation's political history. Barbara Harlow notes that within resistance writing, there is an interest in politicizing interpretations of events. Through the development of a historical analysis that exposes the

political and cultural domination of these “Master Narratives,” the author presents a narrative that questions or opposes oppressive ideological paradigms (78). In Bacheng’s novel, he demonstrates that these close connections between religion and power and the ways in which colonial and post-independence governments have sought to dominate the Guinean nation by controlling Catholicism essentially mark Guinean religions as a contested space.

4.4 Formal Education and Religion as Agents of Cultural Alienation

El párroco de Niefang demonstrates that Western religious education has an alienating effect on the former colonial subject, and this jeopardizes his ability to lead post- independence.¹⁵ In Father Gabriel’s interaction with most of the other characters, there is a perceptible cultural distance between them. Gabriel, for the most part, knows Fang religious beliefs and practices, but does not seem to have experienced them. In line with this, *El párroco de Niefang* shows the alienating effects of colonial education, precisely, seminary training on the individual. Although the protagonist comes from Niefang, he does not share in the native religious worldview of his community and is for the most part, estranged from them. In a sense, he is an

¹⁵ My reading of this novel identified Father Gabriel as belonging to the Guinean native elite as defined by Alvarez- Chillida and Nerín (33-55), who received Spanish formal and religious education under the auspices of the colonial administration. In addition to creating hybrid identities, the Western religious worldview Father Gabriel adopted, distanced him from his indigenous culture more than it did for the other members of the community. In contrast to other characters like Macuale who accept both Spanish and native beliefs easily, Gabriel shows to have assimilated Spanish religion more than the other members of the Niefang community. This demonstrates that even within conceptualizations of hybridity, there are different levels of the assimilation of the dominant culture, and the retention of the subjugated culture, and this could impact relations with the members of the community. In my assessment of the protagonist’s experiences, it is not that Gabriel is ignorant of his traditional African cultural practices. My claim is that due to the imposition of Catholicism and formal education, he had never been integrated well enough into this aspect of his native culture to experience and understand some fundamental practices within the indigenous religious system, and this section attempts to articulate this.

insider-outsider, a person who is spatially located in his homeland, Niefang but whose religious orientation, for the most part, has excluded Bieri practices and customs. As a result, Father Gabriel has difficulty understanding fundamental religious practices such as *mibili* and its importance within the native belief systems of the Fang people:

Gabriel asistía a toda esta ceremonia sin darse cuenta de lo que pasaba, sin creer lo que estaba viendo sus ojos. Había visto la inaudita metamorfosis del mozo de Edum, pero le costaba admitir aquella evidencia de ultratumba. No sabía exactamente la actitud que debía adoptar durante aquella ceremonia esotérica. Todo había cambiado: el metabolismo de Ndong, el comportamiento de las mujeres y la conducta de los hombres. Los campesinos seguían y cumplían todos los detalles del ceremonial con toda naturalidad y familiaridad, mientras el sacerdote experimentaba una vaga sensación de exclusión. Se encontraba en un mundo extraño, en medio de su comunidad africana. Gabriel, en su soledad, pensó en las palabras de Ndong “tú no eres de los nuestros,” le había dicho. (48-49)

This extract identifies the origin of Father Gabriel’s personal crisis. The feelings of isolation that he experiences stem from a cultural alienation instigated when he was inducted into Western religious formation. Father Gabriel was born in Niefang, on the continental region of Río Muni during the occupation of the Spanish. After his preliminary education in Spanish Guinea, he travelled to the Vatican to complete seminary training, after which he returned to Equatorial Guinea as a priest. Father Gabriel is emblematic of a small elite group of natives who were handpicked by the colonial administration to respond to the increasing demand for support for missionary and educational projects as the colonial administration extended its efforts into other parts of the colony (Alvarez- Chillida and Nerín 39).

However, the colonial education that these individuals received did more than hispanicize them. Its implementation disrupted indigenous modes of life through which Africans passed on their culture inter-generationally. In Spanish colonial discourse of the first period of Franco's rule, from 1938 to 1959, the conception of the non-European other as *homo infantilis* was the framework that shaped the imperial administration's plan for formal education within its colonies in Africa. It implemented a religious educational model through which Catholicism became the most important instrument of ideological assimilation (Sánchez Molina 111). From its very inception, colonial education sought to inculcate into its African subjects a deep patriotism for Spain, its king and its national symbols (Alvarez-Chillida and Nerín 40-6). Consequently, this system aimed to create natives who would be loyal to Europe's civilizing missions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the colonization of Equatorial Guinea, the Church and the colonial state were closely linked and performed their functions in a way that spurred the process of cultural erosion among indigenous communities. Acts like the *Patronato de Indígenas* established a social hierarchy to racially segregate Spaniards from Africans¹⁶, also regulated and accorded civil rights, economic prospects and social mobility to Guineans based on their level of assimilation and adoption of Spanish culture. The principal stipulation it laid down for attaining the status of "emancipado parcial" or "emancipado pleno" was the adoption of Catholicism (Ndongo-Bidyogo 55; Sundiata 1996: 175). In the educational system also, the imposition of the Spanish language as the sole medium of instruction and in all administrative

¹⁶ The *Patronato de Indígenas* was established in 1928 by the Spanish administration to regulate the civil rights of indigenous communities under colonial rule. Under this Act, it accorded civil statuses to its Guinean subjects (Ndongo-Bidyogo 55). The attainments of each status accorded the native individual some conditional rights. The *Patronato de Indígenas* over the years experienced minor modifications but stayed in effect until 1958 (Sundiata 1996: 176).

spheres displaced the importance of native languages. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kenyan novelist and theorist argues that European colonial education which relies on the "mother language" as the unique medium of instruction alienates indigenous learners from their indigenous cultures. For him, such educational policies elevated European culture as the culture of modernity, relegating indigenous languages into the realm of the primitive and backward. He also argues that the native's immersion in colonial education drew learners away from their indigenous contexts and tended to disrupt the cycle of cultural transmission from the older generation, and even displace or erode fundamental aspects of indigenous culture (110-115).

From the discussions of colonial education and its underlying ideologies, as well as the laws which governed Guineans, it becomes evident that the operations of Catholicism in Guinea aimed to displace local African religions. This resulted in the subordination of indigenous cultures to the ethnocentric cultural paradigms of the colonial system. Consequently, Gabriel's adoption of Catholicism dissociated him from his indigenous cultural roots. He is unable to establish profound and meaningful connections with the people in his community and he suffers from the cultural identity crisis that comes from being Europeanized to a large extent by Western religion and its formal education. Thus, Bacheng's story of Father Gabriel points to the psychological trauma that the assimilation of this singular religious worldview produced in the individual:

En medio de aquella barahúnda humana el padre Gabriel se sentía desesperadamente aislado... Se hubiera podido explicar la crisis del joven sacerdote por un problema de identidad. Gabriel ya no se identificaba con aquella gente condenada irremediabilmente a vivir los cien años de soledad... Era una comunidad demasiado

sana, demasiado pacífica, mansa y genuina que se acomodaba fácilmente con la suerte que le reservaban los ancestros. (*El párroco de Niefang* 102)

Ironically, it is Gabriel whose inability to identify culturally with his own people that condemns him to solitude. The narrator's reiteration of Gabriel's feelings of loneliness and alienation throughout the text makes visible the adverse psychological effects of acculturation inherent within the imperial project of education. Not only was it a practice whose aftermath causes an identity crisis at the personal level but it was also counter-productive in the sense that it erected cultural barriers between the native elite, such as the priest, and the people that they were trained to lead. Fra Baltasar Molinero notes that the moral and social leadership and the identity of the priest figure in the post-Macías narrative is in crisis because these individuals are navigating profound cultural conflicts (116). The crisis Molinero refers to stems from the assimilation of the colonizers culture and this jeopardizes the individual's ability to connect with the members of his social or ethnic group.

Father Gabriel's struggle to fit into the native cultural paradigm of his African community does not imply that he fit into that of the dominant culture. In reality, he struggles to find his place within the colonizer's world because of its Manichean ideologies:

...decía que el mal era lo negro, lo oscuro, el mal simboliza el mundo de las tinieblas. En tanto que el bien era lo luminoso, lo blanco, lo puro. El bien simboliza la luz del día. El padre Gabriel miró sus manos, que sobresalían apenas de la holgada sotana. Su sotana era blanca y sus manos eran negras. El misionero sintió una sensación ambigua como si flotase entre dos mundos. (41-2)

The protagonist's feelings of floating between two worlds, where he neither fully belongs to one nor the other, testifies to an intense personal conflict and feelings of alienation. However, it is also characteristic of an ambivalence within postcolonial communities which are African in origin, but whose social institutions have been strongly shaped by Western colonial ideologies. For Homi Bhabha, this ambivalence undermines colonial hegemony, but it also is indicative of the trauma of the colonial subject due to the failure of colonialism to perfectly replicate itself (110-11). It is this cultural conflict generated by his affinity to Western culture that Bacheng's text profoundly explores in order to point to the effects of colonial culture on the native individual.

Alfonso Sadi's analysis of *El párroco de Niefang* points out that Father Gabriel's personal and psychological drama is a search for his African essence (47). In Father Gabriel's meetings with his lover, María Soledad, he is anguished at not finding his place within both worlds:

¿Qué quieres que te diga? – contestó el sacerdote con un profundo suspiro –. Yo no sé lo que me pasa...te quiero a ti, quiero a la Virgen, respeto a Dios, amo a mi parroquia, a los ancestros, estoy confuso. Incluso quiero volver a alabar a los *bieres* (estatuillas con huesos de ancestros) como lo hacía mi abuelo...los espíritus...no sé lo que quiero... (113)

Eventually Father Gabriel embraces native Fang beliefs. This is epitomized in his adulterous relationship with María Soledad, with whom he fathers a child who represents his connection back to his community. In Marvin Lewis's analysis of this novel, Father Gabriel's attitude borders on hypocrisy as he pretends to respect Catholic canon, yet he proclaims the

procreation of the species to be of utmost importance (160). The hypocrisy that Lewis criticizes the protagonist for is essentially Gabriel's acceptance of his community's ancestral values without abandoning his Catholic spiritual orientation.

The narrator uses Father Gabriel's story to develop an analysis that reveals the personality conflicts that colonial religious education engendered within people like Father Gabriel. It effectively challenges the humanitarian narrative within Spanish imperial discourse to point to the psychological trauma that it produced in the individual. The experiences of the protagonist all through the novel demonstrate a profound internal conflict that jeopardizes his ability to provide moral and social leadership. The figure of Father Gabriel, much like the protagonist in *Los poderes de la tempestad* represent a small group of Africans whose adoption of Western culture through colonial education and religion, made them hybrid but also estranged them from their culture and hindered their ability to fully connect with the members of their community.

4.5 Revising Colonial Representation through Hybridity

One of the ways in which Bacheng lends complexity to his text is in how it provides a nuanced view of the colonial experience for the different groups of people who lived under Spanish rule. *El párroco de Niefang* demonstrates how colonialism had varying impacts at the personal and the collective levels. If for characters like Father Gabriel, it immersed him profoundly into Western culture to the point of alienating him ideologically from his people, for the Niefang community and its environs, it created a hybrid religious system. This novel's exposition of the religious mores of the Niefang people contradicts an imperialist narrative of a people who have completely repudiated their native beliefs and have willingly embraced Spanish culture. Such images constructed mainly within official documents and reinforced through colonial

literature served to demonstrate the fruits borne by the West's civilization campaign in Guinea and to justify its political expansion in Africa.

Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism* (1978), discusses how European scholars of the Orient constructed representations of Middle Eastern peoples and cultures through Western lenses. For Said, imperialist sentiments undergirded how these authors produced, managed and shaped the identity of non-Western communities. These depictions were not thoroughly objective. They were connected to the operations of European power and helped strengthen a political discourse which justified its control and exploitation of faraway regions. In Equatorial Guinea, late colonial discourse sought to highlight Spain's humanitarian achievements in Africa. In an atmosphere of growing discontent against European domination of the African continent, Spanish colonial newspapers and other print media circulating during these times looked to cement Spain's evangelical mission and developmental efforts within the public imagination.¹⁷ As such, the works of Guinean contributors were subjected to the censorial apparatus of the colonial administration. Many of these submissions recounted Christianized indigenous folktales and repeated imperialist perceptions of Africa (Odartey-Wellington 8).

These images were positioned to give credence to Spain's long presence in Guinea. The allographic foreword to the first Guinean novel *Cuando los Combés luchaban* (1953) exemplifies this position. In this preface, renowned Africanist at the time, Carlos González Echegaray, lauds the Guinean author's adoption of a Eurocentric perspective of the colonial encounter: "No deja

¹⁷ Within Spanish imperial discourse, representations of the "other" vary according to the exigencies of colonial rule. As such, the aspect of Spanish colonial discourse highlighted in this section is not representative of Spain's entire conceptualization of its relationship with and perception of Spanish Guinea, as this in itself has been subject to modifications in framework and approach in line with the political compass of Spain from its acquisition of Fernando Po in 1778, until its departure in 1968.

de ser curioso el hecho de que la novela está pensada y sentida “en blanco”, y sólo cuando la acción se desarrolla entre indígenas, solamente en parte, y como un espectador, el escritor se siente de su raza” (218). Furthermore, Echegaray affirms the writer’s assimilation of Spanish culture, describing him as a “católico ferviente” (220). These coupled with his praise of missionary efforts in education and evangelism reinforce notions of Spain’s success in assimilating Guineans into Spanish culture:

Todo tiene su explicación: El clan de los combes de Río Benito, al cual pertenecían los antepasados del joven autor —católico ferviente— fue evangelizado por los misioneros protestantes a fines del pasado siglo. Por aquella época ya existían también en lo que hoy es nuestra Guinea, misiones católicas pero unas estaban más al norte del teatro de esta novela (misioneros franceses, ya que entonces esa zona pertenecía a Francia) y los otros más al sur, que eran los misioneros españoles claretianos, en las islas de Corisco y los Elobeyes y en Cabo San Juan y Estuario del Muni. Posteriormente la mayor y mejor parte del pueblo combe ha entrado en la religión católica gracias al constante esfuerzo de los citados misioneros Hijos del Corazón de María ... (Qtd. in Onomo-Abena 228)

What the prologue attempts to establish in the minds of its metropolitan readers is the complete Christianization of African communities under Spanish authority. Sosthène Onomo-Abena, a Cameroonian scholar on Guinean literature, is of the view that Gonzalez’s words show how representations of Guineans within colonial literature reinforced Spanish colonial discourse. For him, this foreword was a space that projected the collective identity and the social imaginary of the colonizer about the colonized (218). Thus, this preface reproduced and circulated images which used Guinea’s adoption of Christianity to homogenize these communities, all the while ignoring the ways in which native religions continued to co-exist with Christianity. M’bare

N'gom also concurs with this view. For him, Evita's novel is an apologia of Spanish colonialism and was widely considered a propaganda tool by the Spanish colonial press because it demonstrated the fruits of Spain's mission in Africa (513).

Because of the ideological paradigm inherent within colonial representations of their subjects, postcolonial writers have often contested Western constructions of its Others through narratives that challenge Eurocentric discourse of its Others, which in turn disrupts the functioning of colonial power. Many of the postcolonial works of contemporary Guinean writers impinge upon a reconstruction of Equatorial Guinea's image because it has been primarily shaped through Spanish colonial archives and the colonial literature emanating from this period (Sampedro-Vizcaya 354). The colonial archives refer to the massive systematic collection of, and interpretation of data about the colonized world by Europeans which were used as the yardstick to put in place administrative, political and legislative policies to further control the subject. Several pieces of colonial literature in the form of administrative documents, travelogues, novels, plays, travel writing, and personal journals, etc. contribute to the imperial archive. This demonstrates that the politics of producing knowledge, where gathering facts are not objective but rather a careful organization of information for the greater purpose of control. The archives represent a textual colonization of the world by inscribing within itself its right to define subjugated communities (Nayar 12).

Bacheng's exposition of Niefang religious beliefs as hybrid contradict representations of Guineans emanating from Spanish colonial discourse. This text insists on a representation of the Niefang community and its environs to provide a more realistic picture of the religious transformations that have taken place since its encounter with Europe. In this novel, the people of Niefang have adopted Christianity. However, contrary to colonial representations, they have

not relinquished their Bantu heritage, and these configure significantly in their religious worldview.

4.5.1 Hybridity

In *El párroco de Niefang*, the religious identity of the people of Niefang as hybrid flows from both Spanish and Fang cultural streams. Within postcolonial theories, hybridity is used extensively to describe the effects of the interactions between two or more different cultures. Philip Nel, a South African postcolonial scholar, offers an observation of what it means to be hybrid: “The colonial subject is afforded a discursive space in a place of hybridity, which entails that it is at two places at the same time—an in-between space between two cultural narratives. Hybridity becomes a modality of colonised existence” (4). Homi Bhabha, who has theorized extensively on this subject, argues that post-colonialism, culture cannot be viewed as a colourful mosaic of entities lumped together harmoniously, as this ignores that there are always points of conflict and crisis (*Art* 82). In *El párroco de Niefang*, several binary oppositions often conflict with each other: Tradition and modernity; Catholicism and *Bieri* practices; Hispanic and Fang cultures. Bacheng uses these oppositions to show the cultural frictions that come with the process of hybridity, as well as their oppositions and also how they converge in the configuration of the people’s identity. For him, these conflicts manifest in the form of a cultural ambivalence. Bhabha also explains that hybridity opposes binarity to produce an intertwined concept of identity:

For me, the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This Third Space displaces the histories that constitute it,

and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (*Location* 211)

Bhabha's conceptualizations of hybridity are instrumental in helping understand how Bacheng frames identity in this text. For this author, Niefang is an ambivalent community whose dual belief system at once acknowledges the survival and even contemporary relevance of ancestral values and displaces inaccurate representations of these populations within imperial historiography. Avomé Mba explains in her article, "Religiosidad, independencia y conflictos culturales" that for many Guineans, adherence to the Catholic faith does not imply their subjection to the dominant cultural discourse of imperialism: "En la obra, la práctica del cristianismo no se percibe como una sumisión de los personajes a un orden institucional establecido" (80). This means that the people of Niefang have aspects of identity that have been shaped by Spanish religion and ancestral values. This position is exemplified by the character Macuale, who represents the belief system of the larger population:

Siendo habitante de Comandachina, Macuale se había iniciado en el arte de la ciencia nocturna, más concretamente en el arte del *mibili*, la ciencia de la comunicación con los muertos... Como la mayoría de los guineanos, Macuale era un buen católico, iba a misa con su familia todos los domingos y fiestas religiosas; cargaba la cruz en la procesión pascual y oficialmente tenía una sola mujer, con ella había ido al altar para jurar eterna fidelidad. (37)

Macuale, like many of the other characters practices Christianity, but without abandoning his ancestral Bieri beliefs. This figure symbolizes the fusion of opposing belief systems in the configuration of Guinean religious identity. As the narrative demonstrates, traditional practices

such as polygamy, which belong to the pre-colonial past continue to maintain their social relevance: “En África, la poligamia sigue siendo una institución válida, herencia del pasado mundo tradicional. Pero en las ciudades, la poligamia es el signo exterior de la promoción social. Para sus familiares y paisanos, Macuale había hecho lo propio de su condición social” (38).

Bacheng further explores this religious hybridity through the fantastic.¹⁸ It dramatizes how both belief systems intersect in the course of Father Gabriel’s search for proof of the existence of the Christian God. In this episode, Father Gabriel’s conversation with another character Ndong is interrupted when the latter becomes possessed by the spirit of Gabriel’s deceased friend, Patricio. In this conversation, Ndong acts as the intermediary between the world of the dead and the living:

– ¡Que se acerque el padre Gabriel! – pidió el espíritu.

El curandero hizo avanzar al misionero hasta donde se encontraba tendido el hombre en trance. Gabriel notó que Ndong había adoptado la misma posición de Patricio cuando este se disponía a dormir, la expresión de su cara era idéntica a la del muerto.

¹⁸ Several scholars have studied the fantastic with varying conclusions, but this study defers to Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of the term: “In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know ... there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination - and the laws of the world remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality - but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty... The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). I use this term to describe the protagonist’s interaction with the spirit of his dead friend, Patricio. In this exchange, what is possible and the impossible within the laws of nature are confounded and leaves the protagonist (and sometimes the reader) with no concrete explanation for such supernatural events.

– ¡Eso no es posible! – exclamó el cura.

– ¡Es posible, amigo mío! – dijo el muerto –. Yo querría decirte casi lo mismo que te explicó Ndong en el coche.

– ¡Patricio, Patricio! – gritó el cura –: ¿has visto a Dios? ¿Dime, le has visto?

– Aquí no se ve a Dios, aquí donde estoy no hay dioses, pero lo que sí se ve, es la existencia.

– ¿La existencia?

– Sí, padre, la existencia, la gran verdad. (72)

In his text, Bacheng marries traditional religious practices with the Christian faith. Father Gabriel is searching for answers about the Christian God from an ancestral traditional source. This is not only contradictory, but it also demonstrates how Father Gabriel arrives at a harmonization of his Catholic beliefs with his ancestral practices.

The dual religious practices of the people of Niefang, and by extension the national community is a palimpsest of social history that makes visible that the traces of ancestral religious practices and the influence of European religious beliefs as both vital aspects of Guinean identity. There are two versions which describe the last moments of Macuale, the Christian polygamist and practitioner of *mibili*. In the first, Macuale succumbed to the ministrations of Father Gabriel:

Macuale escuchó la petición del misionero, a saber: el abandono de su segunda esposa.

A fin de cuentas, pensó, solo quieren una pequeña cosa, una palabrita, un sí, como un novio. Tras hacerse este razonamiento, ante la estupefacción general, el moribundo se

levantó, y se puso de hinojos ante el ministerio de Dios, a quien suplicó que le confesara... (45)

In the second account of this character's last moments, he passed into the next world in a manner befitting of his social stature and his fundamental religious beliefs:

Pero cuando Macuale se quedó, según esta segunda versión, el enfermo, animado por la última lucidez y vitalidad que suelen tener los moribundos, momentos antes del último soplo, se levantó y se sintió con las fuerzas para ir a presidir una última sesión de *mibili*, para dialogar con los muertos y preparar su llegada. Se dijo que Macuale murió en una oscura noche de Comandachina rodeado de sus fetiches. (46)

This intermarriage of these dual versions of Macuale's death is characteristic of the ambivalence prevalent in many post-colonial African communities. These opposing accounts of the death of the same man explicitly depict Guinea's dual cultural ideology. However, the notion that Macuale spends his final moments in conversation with his ancestors, marks that return to his fundamental spiritual belief system. For the narrator, even though Guinean cultural identity had been shaped by a Hispanic cultural heritage, African values and practices was the canvass on which this identity was projected.

The concept of hybridity has often been used to describe the effect that dominant cultures had on native conceptualizations of self. Father Gabriel's interactions with the people of Edum and its surrounding towns reveal practices, belief systems and customs of a people that have been resistant despite missionary efforts to eradicate them. Thenesoya Vidina Martín de la Nuez, a Spanish scholar of postcolonial Guinean literature observes that, a considerable portion of the corpus of the postcolonial Guinean narrative remains fixated on the notion of

constructing images of this nation from within (219). In this light, Bacheng's novel is interested in this revision of the colonial archives in a way that displaces imperialist historical narrative to acknowledge that African cultures, customs and practices remain the basis of the hybridity of the Guinean people. Through his descriptions of the religious mores of the Niefang community, the narrator positions himself as a greater authority in representing the social identity of Guineans.

4.6 The Past is Present: Nguemism and its Violation of Human Rights

In its second articulation of resistance, Bacheng's cultural exploration of Niefang from a historical perspective intersperses the narrative with recollections of the atrocities Nguema and his allies committed against the citizens during his tenure. Even though the novel is contextualized in the period following the fall of the dictator, it is evident that his reign is not entirely over. Feelings of powerlessness, fear and silence still linger. In *El párroco de Niefang*, the immediate national past is often recalled because it has marked the characters in an indelible way and continues to influence their present circumstances. These stories of torture, incarcerations and the abuse of citizens' rights are integral to recuperating the erased and silenced experiences of Guineans within the postcolonial history of the nation-state. Eliza Rizo observes that historical sites significant to Guinea's past have been rebranded by the current Obiang government to dissimulate the oppression its predecessors meted out to citizens. As such, within the context of a state-promoted amnesia, the works of postcolonial Guinean authors write against this institutionalized erasure of history from a collective experience (34). The stories of the experiences of citizens that emanate from the works of these authors form part of a larger narrative of the national community's perspective of life under Nguema. These

accounts essentially challenge official versions of the historical record as potent instruments in decentering historical authority from the nation- state.

El párroco de Niefang records several violations of the citizen's rights in various ways. Father Gabriel, together with other clergymen were tortured. Many, like Gabriel's friend, Patricio died because of the torture that they were subjected to: “- Pues porque cuando me mataron en Bata agonice mucho tiempo en un charco de sangre. Aquí, los compañeros se han cansado de limpairme. Sangro mucho.” (71). This graphic description the spirit of Patricio gives not only speaks of the circumstances of his death — which already happened — but invokes the notion of the ongoing nature of this torture. This imagery of wounds that will not stop bleeding is metaphoric of the political and cultural repressions that continues to operate in the country post-Nguema. Women too were easy targets for abuse for the regime and its soldiers, especially those who opposed the blunt violence with which the military acted: “Los milicianos fueron a saquear la casa de Ndong Mbona, una vecina suya que quiso impedir el paso de aquellos hombres fue maltratada y violada en el acto y la madre de Ndong no pudo soportar aquel golpe terrible. Murió en una noche lluviosa de Bata con una cesta de comida en la mano para su único hijo” (80). Bacheng shows here how the actions of the dictatorship, added to the general atmosphere of silence and fear that it created, trampled on the dignities of its women and destroyed families.

Scholars of African post-independence history have cited the Macías Nguema regime as one of the worst dictatorships on the continent. During his tenure, many citizens, including cabinet ministers, were killed, made to disappear, “committed suicide,” or had to escape into

exile.¹⁹ According to religious historians, Wolfgang Hoffman and John S. Pobee, although the independence constitution of 1968 guaranteed all Guinean citizens religious freedom, these rights were not respected. In staging its systemic attack on Western religions, the state expelled foreign church workers, prohibited religious conversions, baptisms, worship and banned various Christian religious celebrations and eventually ordered the closure of all churches. There was also the assassination, torture and public crucifixion — in at least two cases— of Christians (118). When he was ousted by his nephew and Deputy Defense Minister, Lt. Col. Teodoro Obiang in 1979, Nguema was believed to have killed about 50,000 Guineans and another 100,000 had fled into exile (Wiafe-Amoako 188-9).

In *El párroco de Niefang*, memory and history function with politicized implications. In as much it fictionalizes these accounts, the novel's contextualization within history is indicative of the narrative's desire to enunciate experiences that have been erased from national memory. According to Clelia Rodríguez, *El párroco de Niefang* maps out the diverse historical experiences of the Guinean people in contrast to established history and gives evidential support to the claims of human rights abuses during this period (211). Like the works of other Guinean writers, the preoccupation with historicizing these events are indicative of its absence from a national discussion that officially recognizes those tortured and killed by Nguema and his allies. Also, it raises the fundamental question of the politics of historical memory and history and how the subsequent Obiang administration continues to retain a pact of silence concerning these events.²⁰

¹⁹ Randall Fegley estimates that by 1974, about two-thirds of the 1968 members of parliament had been executed or were missing (37).

²⁰ Following Nguema's trial and execution, Obiang declared Amnesty to encourage exiles to return and also ordered the release of some 5,000 prisoners. However, he did not relinquish dictatorial control over the country. Human rights groups such as Freedom House and

Nguema's reign of terror neither ended with his overthrow nor with his death. As the narrative shows, the country continued to remain under stringent and violent military control. Soldiers still patrolled the streets, carrying out their activities with impunity. Another priest in the novel, Father Matanga has a terrifying encounter with the soldiers which almost turned fatal:

Cuando el sacerdote llegó a la orilla, se encontró con una patrulla militar.

— Alto, ¿Quién vive?

— Soy yo — respondió el misionero — ¿Quién anda allí? — Dos militares surgieron de la oscuridad con sus armas automáticas. (57)

In Father Matanga's interactions with soldiers, it becomes clear that strolling in the evenings, or going near the sea, which had been prohibited by the former regime, was still in effect. When he explains to the soldiers his purpose for coming to the beach, they remark:

— Muy bien como no tiene pescado, vamos a llevarlo a la comandancia. Esta gente cree que el mundo ha cambiado en Guinea después de la muerte de Macías — comentó el que mandaba. Los dos hombres empezaron a empujar al sacerdote hacia la costa.

international Non-Governmental Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have designated Equatorial Guinea as a country with one of the worst human rights records in the world. Reports from the United Nations, as well as special envoys for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, have also reported on the abysmal human rights record and the lack of political freedoms in Equatorial Guinea (Williams Jr. 620-27). The current Obiang government been actively rebranding the country's past in a way that erases its complicity in these crimes. See Elisa Rizo, "Equatorial Guinean Literature in a Context of State-Promoted Amnesia." *World Literature Today*, vol. 86, no. 5, World Literature Today, 2012, pp. 32-36.

— Ahora, bajo tortura nos irás explicando lo que hacías en alta mar... (58)

The close links that the Catholic church maintained with the colonial state made this institution a de facto enemy of the independence regime. Even decades after the fall of Macías Nguema, his legacy of oppression and fear lives on, and the incarcerations and arbitrary deaths committed by the previous regime remain unaccounted for. It is precisely the lack of information documenting this period, and the erasure of these experiences from contemporary national discourse that makes Bacheng's novel a compelling criticism against the unjustified acts of violence that the citizens of this country suffered. Using fiction as an instrument of social expression, Bacheng's *El párroco de Niefang* weaves a compelling narrative that condemns these actions and shows how Nguemism continues to operate even after its supposed demise.

Conclusion

The Equatorial Guinean community faces a complex nexus of challenges and Bacheng's text has examined these through the prism of religion. His exploration of this subject is nuanced and shows how the colonial experience had varying levels of impact on its colonial subjects. For individuals like Father Gabriel, it displaced them culturally, alienating them from their native cultural milieus, but neither did it center them within Spanish culture. On the other hand, for the people of Niefang and its environs, the imposition of Western culture added to the cultural diversity within the country and formed the basis for the Bantu-Hispanic cultural heritage.

The analysis presented in this chapter has articulated diverse expressions of resistance within *El párroco de Niefang*. Essentially, this novel politicizes a narrative about religion as a

way of subverting imperial discourse on the colonial experiences of Guineans. Through Father Gabriel's crisis of faith, the narrative shows how the colonial religious education negatively impacted the individual. It did not simply inculcate in the colonial subject the Catholic faith but assimilated them into Spanish culture in a way that estranged individuals like Father Gabriel from his own Fang Bieri *beliefs*. Consequently, their ability to provide sound moral or political leadership and to meaningfully connect with members of their community is uncertain. Additionally, Bacheng's exploration of the hybrid culture of the Niefang people position him as a greater authority on Guinean culture. His text revises representations of Guineans within late Spanish colonial discourse and point to its failure to acknowledge the cultural transformations within the communities they governed. In this way, Bacheng's text challenges the imperial gaze, its point of view and its overall objectivity in depicting the lives of its subjects. The colonial past is not the author's only object of enquiry. This text insists on resurfacing the erased and silenced experiences of Guineans during the country's first presidency. In this sense, Bacheng weaves into the text collective voices that dismantles nguemist historical narrative of the nation. Guinean independence is used as a metaphor for the deprivation of the cultural freedoms that Guineans had before independence. Through these stories, this novel inserts itself the wider narrative that delegitimizes Equatorial Guinea's institutionalized national history of this period.

5 CHAPTER 5: RECLAIMING HISTORY IN *LOS PODERES DE LA TEMPESTAD*

5.1 History, Cultural Identity and Complicity as Discourses of Resistance

Donato Ndong-Bidyogo's novels are some of the most studied within the postcolonial narrative of Equatorial Guinea. Due to its relativity to a diverse readership, Ndong-Bidyogo's works have been the subject of various interpretations, which link them to the political and socio-cultural challenges of the post-independence state. The compendium of this author's works reflects on the social and political systems of Equatorial Guinea and its perpetuation of governance practices that replicate colonialism. Among these texts, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) stands apart for its candid criticism of Nguemism. This novel recounts the story of an unnamed lawyer who returns home from Spain after training as a lawyer to help build Equatorial Guinea after independence. He is accompanied home by his Spanish wife and their biracial daughter. Under Guinea's first postcolonial presidency, the country had been exploited and devastated than it had been under colonialism. It was marred by violence, ethnocentrism, nepotism and corruption, and these conditions jeopardized his purpose of contributing to the development of his country. Given this historical context, this novel becomes a critical mouthpiece against this government by breaking a long silence through the fictionalized experiences of its citizens.

Culture and identity play a significant role within the novels of Donato Ndong-Bidyogo. Earlier representations of Culture within his first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), divulge various aspects of indigenous Fang customs and religious practices in order to trace the influences of Spanish cultural hegemony in shaping the emergence of

Equatorial Guinean national identity. However, in the sequel, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), the novel frames Guinean cultural identity as hybrid, and this is used as a reaction to the oppressive regime of Macías Nguema, which tried to ethnicize national identity. Contemporary Equatorial Guinean culture is a blend of indigenous and European cultural elements as a result of Spanish colonialism. Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad* demonstrates this hybridity as the true manifestation of the Guinean people's identity.

Culture has been defined in many ways. Shuang Liu et al. define it as “the particular way of life of a people, comprising the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, traditions, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, worldviews, material objects and geographic territory” (55). Liu et al. also make distinctions between the various elements that form culture. For them, the inner core of culture is made up of a people's history, identity, and beliefs. The intermediate core comprises of the cultural activities that provide evidence to the history, identity and values, while the outer core consists of the manifestations of these in daily life. These include the rules, customs, norms, religious and political systems (56). Ndongo-Bidyogo's engagement with Culture encompasses the inner core as well as its manifestations within the outer core. Aspects of Culture such as history, identity, and sexual norms pertaining to women stand out in this novel. This is important because Ndongo-Bidyogo examines the question of resistance through the prism of cultural identity. The novel evokes Equatorial Guinean history, both colonial and postcolonial, to show that Nguemism and the imposition of its ideologies on the national community was a suppression of the people's identity, freedom to political expression, and the perpetuation of patriarchal norms regarding female sexual behaviour.

Ndongo-Bidyogo's works fuse history with fiction so closely that it is impossible to disentangle analyses of this author's texts from the historical, social and political events that created them. The question of history, who tells it and for what purposes are often interrogated within postcolonial studies. Its response to colonialist "master narratives" is not a renaissance of the past or the simple desire of the colonized to create its own historical memory by writing a different story (Ashcroft 98). Postcolonial histories analyze colonial historiographies and the nation-state and their practices. Ultimately, it is intent on revising the historical programming within imperial discourse and even the historical narrative of the post-independent nation-state. In this regard, *Los poderes de la tempestad* responds to the historical inaccuracies within colonial and postcolonial historiography by providing Guinean perspectives of colonial and postcolonial events. In doing this, the narrative also relies on the Guinean people's collective memory to revise the colonial and, especially, the postcolonial historical script.

Within the postcolonial African narrative, the return of the native son to his indigenous cultural roots metaphorically implicates a rediscovery of identity. In this novel, there is a valorization of both Spanish and indigenous Fang cultures as influential in shaping the individual's identity. This hybridity is a reaction to the oppressive identity politics of the Nguema regime. Ashcroft et al. describe hybridity as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (118). For Homi Bhabha, whose extensive writings on this subject makes him an obligatory point of reference, hybridity is identified by its opposition to binarity and its difference from the cultures from which it emanates. He writes that: "The margin of hybridity where cultural differences 'contingently' and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups ..." (296). Hybridity, therefore, is not a simple

blend of cultures but a space where the postcolonial subject identifies as being neither wholly indigenous nor belonging entirely to the colonial culture, but as a different entity influenced by both cultures. However, Nguema ethnicized the rhetoric of the Guinean nation. Who was included in the nation and who was not was determined by Nguemism.

Spanish colonialism of Equatorial Guinea also impacted the norms of Guinean communities regarding female sexuality. Before Catholicism took hold, Guinean women faced various injustices rooted in patriarchal norms, and these women responded by using indigenous strategies to challenge oppression (Allan 67-9). However, despite the feminization of its justifications for colonizing, colonialism ultimately helped to institutionalize female discrimination. *Los poderes de la tempestad* presents the case of a female paramilitary officer whose resistance to anti-colonialism is also tinged with an opposition to patriarchal norms surrounding female sexuality. While the novel frames her resistance as anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal sentiments are revealed that point to a double oppression from both nguemist and colonialist ideologies of the Guinean woman's sexuality.

This chapter discusses the strategies of interpolation and revision that *Los poderes de la tempestad* uses to challenge nguemist history of the dictatorship period. It looks at how this author tackles the appropriation of history by Nguema in a way that delegitimizes the dictator's claim to absolute power. Through the discursive strategies of interpolation, the narrator revises aspects of the nation's history that had been erased or silenced at the institutional level. Nguema appropriated a colonial cultural hegemony and rebranded it to impose a singular identity on the national community. Similar to Spanish Hispanicization of the diverse ethnicities of Guinea, Nguema also structured this new nation along monoethnic lines and citizens who showed any affinity to European culture were severely punished. The protagonist

resists these ideologies by acknowledging hybridity as the marker of national identity and subsequently refuses to relinquish this identity so as to be included in Nguema's nation. The rhetoric of resistance within *Los poderes de la tempestad* not only resides in discursively destabilizing nguemist hegemony. I also demonstrate that this novel explores what resistance means for the different parties who lived under this dictatorship; citizens who were victims, on the one hand, and on the other, accomplices of the regime. This position is exemplified by Ada, a female paramilitary officer, whose alliance with the regime enables her to have privileges reserved for men and protect herself against institutionalized gender abuse. The protagonist's interactions with Ada reveal that while her complicity with the regime enables her to fight against neo-colonial encroachment, it also allows her to transgress traditional patriarchal norms on female sexuality.

5.2 The Author

Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo was born in Alén in 1950 in the district of Niefang on the mainland territory of Equatorial Guinea. After completing his preliminary education in his hometown, he attended college in Bata and then travelled to Spain in 1965 to pursue a bachelor's degree at fifteen. In Barcelona, he studied History and Journalism. It was during his studies there, in 1968, when Guinea attained independence. The series of events that followed shortly after made it impossible for him to return. A few months after independence, the country was thrown into a bloody dictatorship. The sanguinary and tyrannical nature of this regime forced many Guinean intellectuals into exile in neighbouring African countries and Spain.

As a result, Ndongo- Bidyogo was obliged to remain in Spain. During this time, he worked for a Journal in Madrid called *Índice* (Hendel 93). Within this period, he published articles on history, African history and Equatorial Guinea in several Spanish journals, and he

also authored a few short stories. In the field of Guinean history, his most notable works are *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (1977) and *El comercio Español con África* (1980). *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* responds to the lack of a systematic corpus that provides a balanced perspective of Guinean history. In his own words, he wrote this book to give Guineans a “verdadera historia” (Ndongo-Bidyogo 9). This preoccupation came from the realization that not many Guineans and Spaniards understood fundamental events within Guinean history.

Secondly, his concern was also fostered in the context of growing public disinterest with the situation in Equatorial Guinea during the seventies. In 1972, the *Materia Reservada* Act, which effectively banned the public dissemination of news on Guinea, encouraged a general atmosphere of disinterest with what was happening in his homeland. Furthermore, the censorship imposed by Nguema and the shutdown of intellectual activity within the country prevented any scrutiny of his administration by Guineans. It was not until 1976, when this ban was finally lifted, that Ndongo-Bidyogo could publish *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (1977).

It was not until the overthrow of Macías Nguema, in 1979, that Ndongo-Bidyogo was able to return to Equatorial Guinea. After fourteen years abroad, his return back home impacted him profoundly. The country he had left behind had been utterly destroyed by Nguema's administration's corruption and violence. The magnitude of the societal damage that the dictatorship caused made him reflect on his country's historical, political, and social issues. His first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), which marks his transition to the field of the postcolonial novel, becomes the first installment in the trilogy *Los hijos de la tribu*. *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* brings a critical perception of Spanish colonialism, which

interrogates the project of imperialism, and the profound disruptions that it caused within indigenous communities.

The sequel to this first novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), creates the necessary link for navigating the past in order to explain the present because the same child protagonist in *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* returns in this second instalment as a lawyer. *Los poderes de la tempestad* positions itself as a literary tool of political resistance, and this is complemented by the author himself being an outspoken critic of the past and current governments. This novel's primary task is to expand the spaces of resistance within Guinean literature and interrogate the instruments of colonialism through which colonial power dynamics continue to thrive in post-independence society. *Los poderes de la tempestad* merges political activism with literature. As the author himself puts it, "la literatura es motor de cambio en la sociedad" (Onomo-Abena and Otabela 77). This belief that literature holds the capacity to spark change positions *Los poderes de la tempestad* as a critical intervention within contemporary discussions of Equatorial Guinea's challenges to development. Ndongo-Biyogo's novels engage with and encourage transformative thinking within the national and international communities, especially in former European metropolises, many of whose communities are oblivious to the linkages between the freedoms they enjoy and the suffering of people in other parts of the world.

5.3 Structure of *Los poderes de la tempestad*

This novel narrates the experiences of a lawyer who returns home a few years after Guinea's independence to help reconstruct the country after a long period of European exploitation. Upon his arrival, the moral, social and political degeneration he encounters destroys his hopes of participating in rebuilding the nation. Under the pretext of an anti-imperialist revolution,

Macías Nguema operated a panoptic surveillance apparatus that strictly policed its citizens and subjected them to far worse repressions than they had suffered under Spanish colonialism. As the lawyer tries to navigate this highly corrupt administration, the presence of his Spanish wife and their biracial daughter generates confrontations with the authorities, who view his relationship with a white woman as a betrayal of the country's ideals.

On his journey to reunite with the family he left behind in Guinea many years ago, he, together with his wife and other passengers, are forced to witness the shootings of political prisoners in the town of Ngolo. News of his arrival at his parents' home encourages a new wave of persecutions of the male members of his family. After a confrontation with the authorities, one of his uncles is arrested and detained. The unabating harassment of his extended family makes him realize that he has no future in Equatorial Guinea and that he must leave. Shortly after sending his wife and daughter back to Spain, he is arrested, accused of treason, tortured and imprisoned. After a few months, he manages to escape the country's most notorious prison, Blavis and flees the country. With this flight, he regains a new purpose; to denounce the nguemist regime and to draw the international community's attention to the crimes and human rights abuses that the Guinean government has perpetrated against its citizens.

Los poderes de la tempestad is organized around thirteen chapters, with the first chapter numbered zero. The novel is accompanied by a dedication to the author's deceased grandparents and his uncle Patricio, whose mysterious death implicates the Nguema administration. It states: "A mis abuelos, Pascual y Josefina, en su otra vida, /// a quienes debo la permanente mirada hacia atrás que impide el olvido; /// y a su hijo Patricio, muerto sin el consuelo de una tumba para el recuerdo" (5).

In this novel, there is an intertextuality of fiction with autobiography and history. The author's family has suffered the loss of loved ones during Nguema's tenure. The way in which the dictatorship affected the author's family parallels some of the events described in the novel, such as the death of the protagonist's uncle at the hands of Nguema's soldiers in the town of Ngolo. Here too, it is significant to note that while the author's family could not accord their son a final resting place, so also was the lawyer's family (in the novel) not able to give their son a decent burial. This is one reason that makes the author's fictionalization of the experiences of Guinean citizens compelling because this history has affected him as well. While it describes the nebulous circumstances of Patricio's death, it transmits a foreboding sense of silence and censorship and a culture of fear which the novel is determined to disrupt. Through the fictional autobiographical account, the author denounces this sanguinary regime and the devastating humanitarian crisis that it created, which remained hidden from the rest of the world.

The story is related through two narrative voices: a first-person narrator and a second-person narrator. The first voice represents the protagonist's own experiences. It guides readers through his introspections, highlighting the events that ensued between the last years of Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea and Nguema's dictatorship. His narration is complemented by the second-person narrator who fills in gaps by describing the protagonist's experiences as an exile in Spain. M'bare N'gom states that in as much as the text relies on elements pertinent to African autobiographies written in European languages, it also incorporates the orality inherent within traditional modes of narration (66). The narrative uses two voices; a "yo" narrator and a "tú," a second person who balances the perspective of a protagonist who often gets lost in his own introspections. Ultimately, there is an aesthetic and

social dimension to the vacillation between these two voices. N'gom says, "La alternancia entre esas dos voces implica, por un lado, la reescritura del cuerpo de la vivencia individual, y por el otro, y entroncando con aquella, refleja la memoria y la experiencia de toda una comunidad y su historia" (69). The alignment of the protagonist's personal aspirations for independent Guinea with that of the collective national community resonates with the pattern for national allegories, which Doris Sommer discusses in *Foundational Fictions* (1991). In this text, she argues that the erotic desire of the protagonist is aligned with nationalism as a rhetoric for the consolidation of national identity (31).

The narration vacillates between the past and the present, interrogating past historical occurrences that produced the current circumstances. The text divulges the contention between the officialized history, which is always linked to colonial and nationalist powers, and unofficial historical accounts, which the narrator uses to counter the official discourse. This is important because "to have history is the same as what it means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates 'us' and not others" (*Postcolonial Studies Reader* 355). A leading scholar of Guinean literature, Benita Sampedro-Vizcaya, notes that the Equatorial Guinean narrative's constant preoccupation with history is an indication of the desire these works have to reconfigure the colonial archive from which the country's history and identity have been projected (351-55). To this end, *Los poderes de la tempestad* signals that this task is not limited to the Spanish colonial context alone but extends well into the Macías administration where the dictator and his allies have substituted national history with the Nguema's personal history.

5.4 Reclaiming History

Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's first two novels each reflect on specific periods of Equatorial Guinea's history. The first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), focuses on the life of the young protagonist during the colonial period. The second novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, revolves around the same protagonist who returns from Spain during the tenure of its first president, Francisco Macías Nguema. Equatorial Guinea's tragic history is not only an intellectual engagement for the author but also one that he has experienced personally. Otabela and Onomo-Abena describe his first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, as the interiorization of these historical events through which the writer questions and tries to find answers to explain his cultural alienation and exile (109).

Ndongo-Bidyogo's work responds to historical events, so it is impossible to divorce any discussion of this author's texts with the historical events that contextualize them. In an interview with Maria Zielina, Ndongo-Bidyogo explains the relationship between his novels and history. He states that:

mis novelas son una explicación desde la literatura de la historia de mi país, Guinea Ecuatorial. Investigo sobre la historia de mi país y fruto de esta investigación son los libros *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (1977), *España en Guinea* (1998) ... De esta manera, puede considerarse que mis novelas no son sino un intento de explicar el Guineano a través de su historia. (Zielina 107)

Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's fiction not only regurgitates historical events as they happened but they bring to light the reactions of Guineans during these turbulent times. To this end, his second novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, captures in granular detail the sentiments of

Guinean citizens who lived under the Nguema regime. These experiences are collated from several interviews the author conducted after returning to Guinea in 1979.

In *Metahistory* (1973), Historian Hayden White notes that historiographical and fictional narratives are related in that the depiction of history and narrative are both creative processes. For him, history distinguishes itself from fiction through its subjection to a scientific method of narrating the past. However, he concludes that writing history has less to do with documenting what is true or false but more to do with the historian's formal argument, emplotment (the type of narration), and ideological implications. He argues that it falls on the historiographer to transfer events onto a narrative framework. Consequently, just like the narrator, the connections established between events are the result of the historiographer's reflection. White also draws parallels between history and narrative in noting that by contextualizing narrative within reality, any discourse of the real becomes impossible to separate from the discourse of the imaginary. *Los poderes de la tempestad* and its contextualization at the apex of the Nguema regime blurs the lines between lived experiences and imaginary ones. More importantly, it provides a social history of the period that is missing from contemporary national discussions of Equatorial Guinean history post-independence. Additionally, it registers the voices and experiences of Guineans, mostly detractors of the regime who have been silenced or entirely written out by official records.

The advent of a new regime dismantled the hopes of accountability for the repressed citizens of Equatorial Guinea. In addition to the corruption of the current Obiang administration, historical sites significant to the country's past have been rebranded to dissimulate the oppression its predecessors meted out to citizens (Rizo 34). Paul M Lützel notes that often when "historians fail to bring to mind certain aspects of historical experience

through memory; then it is often the novelist who must assume this task” (100). Eliza Rizo’s discussion of the function of Equatoguinean contemporary narratives affirms Lützel’s observation. She holds that Ndong-Bidyogo and other contemporary Equatoguinean authors write against this erasure, and their works go beyond articulating their African-Hispanic identities to render the implications of the past, present and future defined by local and global intersections (36).

5.5 Revising Official Postcolonial History

In postcolonial studies, History and its interpretation from a postcolonial perspective is a fundamental one. For Benjamin Zachariah, postcolonial theory emphasizes the need to revise the rules which govern imperial histories and how they are written. According to his observations, colonial historiography projects its own domestic history — that of the colonizer— onto the local histories and geographies of the colonized (380). He adds that the very notion of postcolonial studies constitutes an essential attempt at that renegotiation of History tainted with Western, hegemonic assumptions and teleologies, which must be abandoned in favour of other ways of seeing the past (381). For the postcolonial historian Majumdar, this is because imperial history is less interested in investigation than it stands for perpetuating a peculiar narrative of the empire (82). In a similar vein, Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks that European history constructed narratives through which all other accounts tend to become variations of the master narrative (*Reader* 383). For Ashcroft, “the framework of imperial history is placed over, and becomes the means of understanding the history of colonized peoples” (85).

Postcolonial theory’s response to the master narrative is not a renaissance of the past or the simple desire of the colonized to create its own historical memory by writing a different

story. Although its aims are diverse, ultimately, what is common to these reactions is revising the historical programming within imperial discourse (Ashcroft 98). Thus, postcolonial histories analyze colonial, decolonization and neo-colonial practices as objects of study. However, their focus of analysis is the nation-state, not in a celebratory tone, but as an apparatus that failed to deliver on its promises mainly due to endemic historical reasons (Majumdar 90-1).

Interrogating history too underlies indigenous African epistemological frameworks. The author's attribution of "la permanente mirada hacia atrás que impide el olvido;" to his grandparents reiterates *Sankofa*, a Ghanaian Akan epistemological concept inscribed within *Adinkra*²¹ symbology which invokes an interrogation into the past and a reflective search for wisdom with which one can move forward. Paul Adjei and George Dei note that "the metaphor of Sankofa to the current discussion on development is a call on African educators to interrogate and use the relevant knowledge of their history for an alternative development possibility for Africa" (174). Similarly, Ndongo-Bidyogo's invocation of history and the need to scrutinize how the nation-state formulates it is a reminder of its centrality to discussions of its decolonization and development.

A critic of Guinean literature, Thesesoya Martin de la Nuez also echoes this compromise with history within the works of another Equatorial Guinean author, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel. In her assessment, Ávila Laurel's novels also present a revisionist space from

²¹ *Adinkra*, which in the Akan language of Ghana means "farewell", refers to an indigenous Akan ideogrammic language medium that expresses the cultural, philosophical, historical institutions of the Akan of Ghana and the Gyaman of Ivory Coast. Adinkra symbolism represents the *Sankofa* epistemological ideology in two ways; a bird moving forward with its head turned back to fetch an egg, and a heart-shaped symbol that also resembles the heads of two birds turned back resulting in a rebirth (Adjei and Dei 173).

which the colonial past is renegotiated and constructed (221). These observations are linked with what the critic Sampedro-Vizcaya describes in the works of Guinean writers as a reconfiguration and an amplification of the archives from which the history of this nation has been constructed and projected (354). The invocation of history and its connections to the archives is significant because of its institutionalizing powers and legitimizing authority. As such, *Los poderes de la tempestad* alerts the reader to one of the predominant functions of this history — as an instrument of legitimization — and proceeds to interrogate nguemist historical rhetoric by acting as a first-hand witness under this administration and denouncing its discursive patterns that resonate with imperialism.

In *Los poderes de la tempestad*, the lawyer and his family arrive at the height of the Macías Nguema dictatorship. Upon independence, the new government, along with its other duties, assume the task of institutionalizing Guinean history. Nguema's henchmen describe him as: "...gran camarada, jefe de Estado y del Gobierno y presidente vitalicio y constitucional de la República, su excelencia Papá Mesie me Nguema Biyogo Ñegue Ndong ha derrotado al neocolonialismo y al imperialismo económico ...” (24). Within the self-styled regime, a personality cult, an anti-colonial discourse and aggressive nationalism all converge to typify the nguemist approach to official history. Along with other Guineans, the protagonist is expected to conform with a master narrative in which the dictator replaces the nation's history with an inaccurate personal history.

The author situates his interrogation of history within a revisionist framework. Through interpolation, the narrative simultaneously rejects and revises the imposition of an official version concerning the recent colonial past:

...que compartisteis con la chiquillería del primo Mbo, seis hijos tenía ya, cuatro niños y dos niñas, el mayor de unos diez años, ninguno de ellos sabía ni leer ni escribir y ni siquiera hablar español porque las escuelas en Guinea ya sólo funcionaban para cantar las alabanzas del Presidente Macías y enseñar a los niños su biografía, contó Avomo a preguntas de Ángeles, un verdadero cachondeo, una biografía inventada, llena de supuestas hazañas para expulsar a los colonialistas y conseguir la libertad total para el noble pueblo de Guinea Ecuatorial, cuando todos conocemos su verdadera historia de colaborador del régimen colonial, pero así se escribe la historia, oyes, y en las escuelas, sólo se habla en las lenguas vernáculas porque el español es un idioma de colonialistas e imperialistas... (44-5)

Here, the narrator renegotiates history from the margins of the discourse privileged by the regime. As he revises the officialized version of Guinean history by referencing collective social memory, he is exposing the true role that Macías Nguema played in the previous colonial administration, and simultaneously contradicting the official version propagated by the regime. Nguema's history is no more than the dictator using the nation as a backdrop on which to impose his own story and to construct his identity. Instead, the text proposes as an alternative a symbiotic approach to formulating history, a process that the text embarks on implementing in order to reconfigure the history of its people.

This novel demonstrates that Nguema reproduced colonial knowledge/power dynamics in its conceptualization and reformulation of national events. As such, the narrator's account aims to dismantle nguemist claim to power through its legitimization of a fictitious story about the dictator's role in the country's attainment of independence. In line with this, *Los poderes de la tempestad* frequently rejects the singular narrative of national history which Macías

Nguema imposed. Ndongo- Bidyogo, like Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, compose stories that are a direct consequence of pivotal historical events. Through recollections, the narrator engages with multiple voices and experiences of Spanish colonialism and the Nguema dictatorship. This engagement with history tends to be polyphonic, related to the sensibilities and subjectivities of Guinean citizens and foreigners' experiences, and ultimately links its preoccupation with questions of personal and national identity. As the author admits, the novel is a product of several historical sources: archives, interviews, news, and has attempted to accommodate the diverse dimensions of this history. Given what the author calls the tragedy that is the history of post-independence Equatorial Guinea (*La historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial*), this novel emphasizes the integral nature of history as a site of representation for all the members of the national community. It reiterates that Guinea's ability to redefine her national identity hinges on its capacity to rewrite its history free of tyranny.

5.6 Cultural Resistance

After independence, Nguemism stagnated every aspect of Equatorial Guinean cultural expression through its ethnocentric ideologies and policies. *Los poderes de la tempestad* demonstrates how this impacted the citizens' expression of their cultural identity and political views. Resistance through culture, either indigenous or hybrid, is a recurrent theme in Ndongo-Bidyogo's first two novels. These works consider the role of culture in challenging the imposition of dominant systems of governance, either in the colonial state or during the post-independence era. For instance, the first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), which is set during the colonial period, shows how its characters try to challenge the

acculturation that Spanish Hispanicization subjected their community to.²² Although the young male protagonist eventually conforms to imposed European cultural standards, it is not without internal conflict. However, in the second novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, the concept of cultural resistance lies in the protagonist's refusal to deny his hybrid identity to adopt a purely ethnocentric and nationalist one. As such, the novel's resistance resides in its anchorage to a hybrid cultural identity that acknowledges the European and the indigenous as fundamental aspects of its identity, values, and worldview.

Within colonial discourse theories, native cultures presented a block on which European colonizers erected arguments of the backwards and primitive nature of their non-western subjects. Beyond the political contention between the colonized and their European overlords, the war over culture was at the epicenter of these confrontations (McClintock 1992, Chatterjee 1993). Therefore, culture has been a recurring theme within postcolonial novels because it is a site where the formerly colonized assert their personal and collective histories and identities.

Bill Ashcroft in *Post-Colonial Transformation* underscores the transformation that colonized communities undergo and continue to experience even after foreign rule ends. He describes these alterations to indigenous cultures as the responses of colonized peoples to the imposition of Western control and an indication of the enormous capacity that colonized cultures demonstrated in adapting to colonialism and eventually fighting against it. As Homi Bhabha puts forth in his discussion on mimicry (85-90), the forced imitation of colonial

²² In his first novel *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), the narrator's indigenous culture is presented as a counter-discourse to the Hispanicization campaign of the Spanish colonial administration. This resistance is construed in terms of overturning European political and cultural dominance.

cultures became a paradoxical feature of colonial resistance. The most sustained form of this resistance lies in how the dominated appropriates the instruments of their subordination to contest representations of themselves as a way of resisting absorption by the dominant culture and to represent postcolonial cultural identity.

A proponent of African liberation, Amílcar Cabral, examines the concept of freedom through the prism of culture. For him, cultural autonomy is a vital step towards national emancipation. Cabral, whose notions of resistance are largely influenced by his experiences of Portuguese colonialism in lusophone Guinea and Cape Verde and by his profession as an agronomist, lays down pragmatic ideas for national liberation through Culture. Cabral denounces the utopianism underlying independence discourses by observing that the attainment of self-governance does not mean complete emancipation from dominant forces. He sees true liberation as “the organized political expression of the culture of the people who are undertaking the struggle” (6). Resistance for him, then, is the manifestation of the cultural personality of the people. Zeyad el Nabolsy, commenting on Cabral, observes that his theories show a deep commitment to some of the essential elements of the philosophical discourse of modernity and leads him to endorse an anti-essentialist and historicized understanding of culture and identity.

Thus, for Cabral, cultural liberation was the assertion of indigenous identity and agency without necessarily taking the form of preserving all existing cultural practices and belief systems (7). Cabral’s validation of culture was not a romanticization of an African cultural past. However, it focused on transforming ethnic affinities and social class solidarities into a multi-ethnic national consciousness of a people’s common predicament and cause. In Cabralian terms, cultural liberation is cultural autonomy and not the preservation of indigenous

culture. Cabral insisted on “the primacy of the political over the military dimension of the national liberation strategy; a strategy that aimed at winning the political soul, the hearts and minds, of the colonized” (Mendy 17-8).

5.7 Hybrid Identity in an Ethnocentric State

The lawyer in *Los poderes de la tempestad* is a metaphor for the hybridity of the Guinean nation. Subsequently, his staunch refusal to conform to this regime’s ethnocentric ideologies, in effect, acknowledges the cultural transformation that the postcolonial subject has undergone as a result of his contact with Europe. This lawyer, who returns with a Spanish wife and their biracial daughter — in the eyes of Nguema’s government — represented the dominance of the Spanish cultural legacy, which Nguemism violently opposed. Consequently, the protagonist’s identification as culturally hybrid always positioned the State against him. Hybridity has been described as an individual or a group’s state of in-betweenness, a crossover of ideas and identities generated by colonialism (Loomba 145). In Equatorial Guinea, this fusion of Bantu and Spanish cultures is the result of the imposition of Spanish culture in indigenous communities through colonialism. However, the Nguema administration and its rhetoric of nationalism attempted to suppress these cultural transformations that the country had undergone and constructed a discourse of nation, national identity, and nationalism along monoethnic lines. This administration viewed the Spanish colonial legacies as a threat to Nguema’s political consolidation of power and sought to eradicate all Western influence from the country. To this end, it aligned with communist regimes — only superficially— and also attempted to recondition its citizens through an aggressive Africanization campaign that sought to impose a singular identity on a culturally diverse people.

In terms of its political ideology, this administration's ideas are nebulous and not easily defined. This ethnocentric style of governance has been called "afro-fascism" (Liniger-Goumaz 14-15), and it is characterized by a violent and vertical monoethnic discourse (N'gom 66). Nguema promised to reinstate the significance African cultures held before they were diminished by colonialism. To this end, he suppressed the teaching of the Spanish language, with the intention of making Fang the official language (Trujillo 885). With the breakdown of relations between Guinea and Spain, and in light of Nguema's increasing opposition to the West, Guinea was hard-pressed to find aid among Communist countries such as China, North Korea and the USSR. As Olegario Negrín-Fajardo explains, Nguema was only superficially influenced by Marxism, and he borrowed aspects of communist ideology such as its authoritarianism, violence, and a cult of personality of its leaders to gain the technological support that was most needed to support his dictatorship. These practices, in turn, helped him to maintain control over Equatorial Guinea (484).

The protagonist who returns home is accompanied by his Spanish wife, Ángeles, and a biracial daughter, Ruth. While interracial marriage was not explicitly prohibited under Nguema, his union with Ángeles was treated with hostility because miscegenation ran contrary to the ethnocentric ideation of the nation the dictator had constructed. Upon his arrival in the capital, Malabo, the authorities question him: "¿Y en España no hay negras? ¿Por qué te has casado con una blanca? Volvió a preguntar en fang, ya más tranquilo, el miliciano que no sabía leer" (41).

This novel counters nguemist notions of identity as a monoethnic entity and a prerequisite for inclusion within the Guinean nation. Contrary to this, it favours a concept of identity that acknowledges the personal and collective transformations of the national

community throughout its historical trajectory. While it respects indigenous cultures and recognizes their value in the conception of identity, it also makes room for aspects of inherited Spanish culture to coexist within the nation. Specifically, it acknowledges the impracticality of recuperating ancient cultures. As the lawyer reflects on his life, he arrives at the following conclusion:

ese mundo también debe cambiar, no estoy dispuesta a vivir mi vida del mismo modo, con las mismas ideas, como la vivieron mis abuelos y mis bisabuelos y mis tatarabuelos, y así hasta el infinito, porque eso no es la tradición. ¿Repetir los mismos conceptos trillados, revivir el mismo espíritu de casta, la misma insolidaridad tribalista, los mismos odios y los rencores eternos, las mismas costumbres caducas... ¿No es cierto que toda tradición que no evoluciona lleva en sí misma el germen de su autodestrucción? (10-11)

Natalia Álvarez Méndez argues that the project of cultural resistance within the postcolonial theories does not attempt a recuperation of indigenous pre-colonial tradition. Instead, it acknowledges the cultural mutations that occurred because of the colonial contact as an equally significant part of the postcolonial cultural makeup (53). Even when the novel pays homage to native customs, *Los poderes de la tempestad* does not pursue purist notions of African culture and identity but expresses how Fang beliefs about the world and Catholicism can coexist as part of an individual strategy for navigating the complexities of the post-independence world.

Reaffirming his identity lies at the heart of the personal confrontations that the protagonist has with the military agents. Miscegenation, in their view, is a betrayal of the

revolutionary ideas that Guineans must conform to. Consequently, while he was held at Blavis Prison, Ada, the paramilitary officer, attempts to recondition the lawyer through rape. Unable to dissimulate his disgust, the lawyer rejects her advances by throwing up. Ada responds with pent up fury: “Muy bien, Abogado, tú ganas. Te doy tanto asco que has vomitado sobre mí, ¿verdad? Pero te juro que pudrirás aquí mismo, y nadie te salvará. Ya no podrás seguir follando con blancas, ni traicionando a tu pueblo. Este es tu fin porque yo misma te voy a romper la crisma” (260-1). Even when overpowered corporally, the lawyer resists this imposition of an ethnocentric nationalist identity. He reaffirms: “Y supe que la miliciana Ada jamás tendría éxito sobre mí, aunque me matara, y empecé a odiarla intensamente, vivamente, ardorosamente, impetuosamente” (257).

The protagonist, who is emblematic of the nation and its dual cultural heritage, finds that he is unable to survive within the hostile cultural climate that Nguemism had created. In a symbolic display of the dictator’s attack on the nation’s Hispanic heritage, the lawyer is separated from his wife and daughter. Finally, he comes to accept that he cannot fit into what was now Nguema’s country. His inability to survive there, despite his intention to help rebuild the country, also points to the postcolonial state’s violent replication of a racial discourse that adversely affected many Guineans.

Los poderes de la tempestad tells the story of a people whose government suppressed their right to a unique cultural articulation. Under this national ideology, the various identities, histories, and social transformations resulting from intercultural encounters are silenced in favour of a nationalist identity. Nguema’s systematic persecution of Guinean intellectuals, members of the national community who still retained ties with Spanish culture, such as the Catholic faith, were dealt with harsh sentences. Essentially, this administration and its

ideologies revoked the citizens' right to freedom of expression. Although colonialism had ended, this regime displayed a reactionary politics to colonial discourse. In doing so, it demonstrated that nguemist leadership avidly consumed and yet paradoxically reproduced the same colonial ideology that attempted to suppress their indigenous cultural identity in the past. In its *modus operandi*, it employed strategies that resonated with former colonial practices: silencing the multiple histories of the people, state repression and institutionalization of discrimination on the basis of cultural orientation.

5.8 Complicity as Resistance: La Miliciana Ada

Even though the dictator never makes an appearance in the novel, the impact of his ideologies is visible within all aspects of national and private life. In *Los poderes de la tempestad*, it is Ada, the female paramilitary officer who embodies the dictator. This transposition is interesting because Ndong-Bidyogo's works seldom address gendered representations. Women are frequently the most affected by dictatorships. In addition to the oppressions rooted in indigenous patriarchal traditions and European colonial norms that they suffer, dictatorships objectify, marginalize and disempower them even more with the sole purpose of demonstrating the despot's absolute power in all national affairs (Otabela 35). The lawyer's few encounters with Ada enable us to see how her gender is essential to understanding her complicity with the Nguema regime.

Anne McClintock argues that nationalism is constructed as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power (353). As such, gender is essential to understanding Ada's alliance with Nguemism as a kind of resistance. Under Nguema, Guinean women were extremely vulnerable and easily became victims of institutionalized abuse and sexual violence. Rather than being victimized and brutalized, Ada's complicity with Macías

Nguema required a usurpation of traits associated with masculinity, which insulated her from this gendered abuse. But in doing so, Ada's actions within this role contradict the normative sexual behaviour prescribed for women in Guinean society. Secondly, by aligning herself with Macías Nguema, Ada is fighting against neo-colonialist encroachment. This stance also demands an understanding of how colonialism's interaction with the cultural norms of the various communities of Spanish Guinea impacted women's lives, including their sexual expressions. As such, the next section discusses the complex nature of Ada's resistance. It looks at how her complicity with the dictator allows her to resist traditional and colonial norms on female sexuality and shows how her participation in this system ensures that she is insulated from the gendered abuse that ran rampant under this government.

5.8.1 Patriarchy and Colonialism

At the onset of colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, Spain propagated the religious discourse of Hispanidad, through which it meant to bring civilization and enlightenment to the territories of Spanish Guinea. This justification for colonizing made missionaries the primary agents of this imperial project. In the territories of Spanish Guinea, the Spanish colonists faced strong kinship structures that they felt they had to break if they were to successfully "civilize" the natives (Tofiño-Quesada 144). In light of this, Spain's interference in these communities' cultures was done to fulfill its humanitarian task of assisting the physical and moral upliftment of its African subjects (Stucki 9). But this justification was alimeted by the image of the helpless woman, suppressed by native customs, and whose predicament necessitated an agenda to "uplift" African women in its colonies by educating them on European norms culture. This discourse essentially "feminized" Iberian colonialism to reflect the humanitarianism within the imperial project (Stucki 12).

Despite this orientalist view, there were aspects of native customs that Guinean women had to resist if they were to escape traditional patriarchal oppression. Before Catholicism, Guinean women faced various injustices rooted in patriarchal norms, and these women responded by using indigenous strategies to mitigate oppression (Allan 66). In his analysis of *Ekomo* (1985), written by María Ansü- Angue, Hubert Edzodzomo Ondo points out that traditionally, the role of the Fang woman was strictly confined to realms of reproduction, domesticity, and rendering economic support to their spouses, thereby excluding them from making decisions that affect them personally (97). Nnanga, the female protagonist in *Ekomo*, laments her invisibility within the social programming of her community: “Yo no soy más que un perfil recortado contra el contorno que me rodea, que es el de la selva. Mi presencia, poco advertida, no es sino una presencia-ausencia cuya importancia nada tiene que ver con el proceso normal de los acontecimientos. Vivo y respiro con la conciencia de mi propia impotencia” (23).

The marginalization of women within Guinean ethnicities does not also imply the absence of structures within their native cultures through which women could counter repression. For instance, among the Fang, *Bwiti* religious practices provided spaces for women to challenge gendered systems of power. There were all-female institutions, such as the *Mewungo*, which were feared by men (Allan 68). This sect dealt with problems women faced, such as infertility, negligence of husbandly duties, and child mortality. Prior to Christianity, Bubi women too could hold important positions through which they influenced decisions such as which male leader was chosen, which marriages were dissolved, and what punishments to mete out to those who violated the norms of the community (Allan 76).

The impact of Christianity and Spanish legal administration on Guinean women's lives are varied, complex and not at all universal. As Enrique Okenve notes, conversion to Christianity allowed some women to take on more significant roles within their communities' religious activities. While some women knew how to use Christianity to gain more rights and expand their sphere of influence, other aspects of their rights were eroded (126). The imposition of Catholicism impacted women's sexual freedoms, especially for Fang women. Unlike other Guinean ethnicities, Fang women were allowed to explore their sexualities before they were married. Conversion to Catholicism among the Fang "converted female sexuality into a terrible and dangerous force to be tamed in and outside of marriage" (Allan 70). Whereas Christian missionaries sometimes gave sanctuary to women who fled abusive spouses, the dissolution of marriage under Catholicism was even more difficult.

The feminization of the colonial discourse did not insulate native women from sexual abuse, exploitation, or European gender norms. These norms existed primarily to preserve the empire and stabilize afro-Iberian identities. Gustau Nerín argues in *Historia en blanco y negro* (1998) that the hypersexualization of Spanish men during colonialism served to trivialize the sexual exploitation of the native women by white men. Institutions like the *Patronato de Indígenas* (an institution formed by Spain to protect Africans) failed to protect indigenous women from the sexual exploitation of white men, especially those who did not have the status of being emancipated. This body enforced controversial and discriminatory laws that, in addition to enforcing Spanish morality and cultural hegemony, institutionalized the patriarchal norms that ensured their abuse (Allan 72-4).

The change in government in the Iberian Peninsula in 1939 did not ease the overall impact of marginalization that indigenous women faced emanating from patriarchy and the

racism and sexism inherent within colonialism. Under the Falange, Spain authorities used discourses of gender to further its imperial projects. After the provincialization of the territories of Spanish Guinea, the Falange sent its women's section, known as the *Sección Femenina*, to their African colonies to indoctrinate the indigenous populations with its own version of gender roles. Until independence, the *Sección Femenina* partnered mainly with local Guinean religious organizations and the Catholic church to reinforce gendered practices that revolved primarily around domesticity and the preservation of Spanish cultural hegemony within the colony (Villena and Cerdeño 126-28).

Spain's colonialism of Spanish Guinea, while staging an economic and industrial exploitation, also impacted Guinean women's lives in highly complex ways. Under colonialism, Guinean women had to resist racism, sexism, and classism. These barriers incited various responses from the women, some of whom either gained few rights or whose social privileges were eroded, diminished or altogether lost. However, despite the diverse nature of pre-colonial Fang, Ndowé, Bubi, Fernandino and Annobonese cultures, Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinean institutionalized patriarchal norms.

5.8.2 Challenging Colonialism and Normative Female Sexual Behaviour

Ada's utterances in *Los poderes de la tempestad* shows that independence from Spain did not overturn the institutionalized marginalization of Guinean women. Neither did the new state address structural changes on the question of women's rights. In addition to being prevalent within the domestic sphere, the abuse of women was visible at institutional levels. The lawyer's cousin, Avomo, is often beaten by her husband. The military officers verbally insult Ángeles and subject her to humiliating physical punishments in many of the couple's encounters with the authorities. Under Nguema's dictatorship, both Guinean and Spanish women continue to

be victims of patriarchal brutalities. Unlike the other women in the novel, Ada is not a victim of the regime but one of its allies, an unusual situation which accords her power usually reserved for men. She expresses this power predominantly through sex. This connection between sexuality and power is a patriarchal trope that predates colonialism itself, but which was reinforced during the colonial times (Stucki 2019; Nerín 1998). The feminization of colonial spaces, coupled with the hypersexualization of the white male colonizer, served to justify European economic and even sexual exploitation of the most vulnerable native population.

Michel Cornaton explains this relationship between sex and power : “Le pouvoir et la sexualité son deux réalités intriquées: Comment le pouvoir pourrait-il se reproduire, si ce n’était pas sexuellement? Là où il y a production et reproduction est le sexe, fût-il imaginaire, ainsi que le fait apparaître la psychanalyse. Le pouvoir est aussi un lieu de plaisir et la sexualité le domain du pouvoir sur l’autre et sur soi-même” (40). Cornaton identifies the sex act as a site where power is reproduced and exercised over the dominated, while the very act asserts the dominant one’s power over himself. The exercise of power also becomes a location of pleasure. Ada’s actions in this domain is representative of the hypersexuality associated with dictators (Otabela 35). She tries to take the place of Ángeles’ husband, by usurping the role of the man in the sexual act, and then later, demanding sex from the lawyer while he was in Blavis prison (66). She exercises this power predominantly through unsolicited sexual advances, sexual innuendos and the sexual act itself (40-1; 257-9). Her engagement in the sexual act then becomes a site for reproducing and reclaiming the autonomy that the Guinean had lost as a result of Spanish colonization. Even after independence, Guineans still had to deal with the

general inequalities which was caused by colonialism prevalent within the country. Clearly for Ada, Spanish colonial exploitation lay at the root of Guinea's national problems:

¿Qué han hecho por ti? ¿Qué han hecho por tu pueblo? Sólo explotarnos y llevarse nuestras riquezas, para enriquecerse a costa nuestra. Sólo somos los hombros sobre los que se aúpan para alcanzar su cielo, su bienestar, egoístamente, y ya es hora de que rompamos eso, porque estamos hartos de soportar su peso. Y tú debes decidir de que parte estás. (257-258)

Ada's exertion of power through sex is of significance in this novel because the question of non-hetero female sexuality is rarely discussed in the Guinean novel. Apart from Trifonia Melibea Obono's *La bastarda* (2016), which addresses female homosexuality within contemporary Guinean society, questions of "non-normative" female sexual behaviour within the post-independence novel remain mostly unexplored. Joanna Boampong, a Guinean postcolonial narrative scholar, observes that lesbianism within African literature does not receive much attention because many of the continent's scholars still consider the notion non-African. She goes on to indicate that perhaps the author, Donato Ndongo-Biyogo, seems to draw attention to this erroneous notion (65-6). As *Los poderes de la tempestad* shows, Ada has lesbian inclinations and manifests sexual desires that are contrary to those prescribed by African tradition. However, her complicity with the regime positions her within what Homi Bhabha refers to as a "liminal space" where she can fulfil these desires. Within the novel, these spaces are hidden crevices marked by the absence of the panopticon, a situation that allows for slippages and deviance from the expected social norms. Areas such as the strip search room and the prison cell where potential subversives are interrogated are entry and exit points into and out of her socio-cultural environment. Hence, Ada's position within the administration

provides the perfect opportunity to manifest her resistance to the heterosexuality imposed on the Fang woman.

Within a patriarchal society that constrains the woman into a domestic and childbearing role, Ada transgresses the norm by being a woman who seeks her own sexual gratification with either sex, isolated from its childbearing function. In contrast to the other women, she is portrayed as a woman who refuses to be the object of male pleasure. Ángeles' recollection of her encounter with Ada, when the latter performed a strip search on her, reveals that Ada is conscious of the sexual expectations placed on women (41). However, instead of complying, she defies these gendered norms by using the protagonist and his wife as objects of pleasure. When Ada confronts the lawyer in prison, she unleashes her pent-up feelings: "Ahora te tengo a mi disposición, para mí sola, abogado. Puedo hacer contigo lo que me plazca sin que tenga que dar cuenta a nadie" (Ndongo- Bidyogo 259). As opposed to her earlier observation of the traditional expectations placed on women to sexually please men, Ada's emphasis on her pleasure marks a break from being an object to being a subject of her own sexual gratification.

With her successful usurpation of masculine privilege, as the unquestionable partner whose demand for pleasure must be satisfied, Ada demands the lawyer's compliance in the same way that Guinean society demands it of women. In acting this way, Ada resists both colonial and traditional patriarchal ideals of normative female sexual behaviour. Her complicity with a regime that brutalizes her own kind speaks to the paucity of avenues available to the Guinean woman to contest the normative heterosexuality prescribed for them.

The Guinean woman's marginalization under the Nguema regime worsened. Women were easy targets for forced recruitments for work on the cocoa plantations of the dictator and

were also vulnerable to the sexual exploitation of Nguema's soldiers.²³ The protagonist's father complains: "sólo quiere nuestro café y cacao y nuestras mujeres y nuestras hijas, que son obligadas a ir a cultivar las fincas de cacahuets y de plátanos y de yuca y de ñames en Mongomo, donde encima las usan como quieren y nos las devuelven embarazadas y ya no nos hacen caso, así destruyen nuestras familias, hijo" (197). Even though Ada enjoys the power and privilege of her status, she is still conscious of how her gender makes her an easy victim under this regime. Ángeles recounts to her husband: "Y al final me dijo que yo era sólo una mujer como todas, como ella misma, que os creéis las blancas si todas tenemos lo mismo en el mismo sitio y sólo servimos para el placer de los hombres" (41). Here, Ada's words corroborate women's vulnerability both within the colonial Spanish and the postcolonial Guinean social systems as a kind of oppression that cuts across race. It is perhaps the futility of this situation that propels her complicity with a regime which positions her to usurp the power traditionally accorded to men. By aligning with the Nguema regime as one of its agents, she insulates herself and acquires immunity against the gendered violence which the regimes operations used as a form of control.

Rose Weitz in "A History of Women's Bodies" reminds us that "Only by looking at the embodied experiences of women, as well as how those experiences are socially constructed, can we fully understand women's lives, women's position in society, and the possibilities for

²³ According to Simon Baynham, "Slave labour was also a hallmark of Macías' despotic regime. Macías forced girls, aged between 14 and 20, to work without pay on his private farm and coffee plantations in his native district of Mongomo. Many of them were made to submit to African and Cuban members of the presidential guard and the local militia. The use of young girls as forced labour was not new: in 1975, the President had ordered his troops to round up able-bodied young women and take them to Fernando Poo to harvest the cocoa crop. Whole families had at that time escaped across the frontier to Gabon and Cameroon to save their daughters from exploitation and degrading sexual abuse" (69).

resistance against that position” (11). Similarly, it is only by scrutinizing the hypersexuality of the dictator incarnate can we begin to grasp the extremely limited avenues of resistance available to women and why Ada must appropriate this attribute as a vehicle for venting her sexual frustration. In effect, she borrows the same tools of patriarchy, which have been used to silence her to resist the colonialist and patriarchal constrictions on the Guinean woman. Although they allow her to temporarily “beat him at his own game” (Lorde 2), they never enable Ada to bring about genuine change. In other words, her ability to act upon her desires only within this capacity reinforces the unacceptability of such practices within the broader context of Guinean society.

Ada’s unsolicited and flirtatious behaviour, coupled with her sexual innuendos, makes the narrator view her constantly with suspicion. By virtue of her behaviour, she stands outside of the definition of an acceptable Fang woman. Furthermore, her desires and gender misalign with the national development project that the protagonist, who embodies the nation, holds for the country. Ada, then, is a complex character onto whom the narrator inscribes the failed resistance of the Guinean state. The nguemist regime’s simplistic inversion of this hierarchy, as the novel proves, doesn’t constitute effective resistance but rather perpetuates the same forms of oppressions that independence ought to abolish. As proof of this, the lawyer vomits, metaphoric of his rejection of Ada and the dictator’s grotesque actions intentioned to recondition him. The compendium of Ada’s speeches defines her as an agent for the state, as a spokesperson for the dictator. Although Ada talks, her lectures consist of orders, monologues, and questions that no one answers, further reinforcing the puppeteering role that she plays within the government. Overall, she has no real voice of her own and cannot effect any change for herself as a woman.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the discourses of resistance within Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad*. The author's preoccupation with history permeates the text, and through the narrator's brief sojourn in the country, he revisits Equatorial Guinean immediate postcolonial history through collective social memory, inserting voices, experiences and interconnected stories in an effort to provide a balanced historical perspective. In this light, *Los poderes de la tempestad* can be read as a text intent on revising the personal history of a dictator masquerading as national history. Secondly, the novel uses hybridity to challenge nguemist ethnocentrism. Through the narrator's reflections, the author presents critical reflections on the cultural and social history of Equatorial Guinea and how this shaped personal and collective identities. The discourse of hybridity in this novel points to the need for an ideological transformation that recognizes the diversity within Guinean national identity. Thirdly, this chapter has looked at what resistance meant for Nguema's allies. It analyzed complicity with the regime from a gendered perspective as a kind of resistance. My discussion showed how Ada's vulnerability because of her gender, compels her to align with the dictator in displaying her anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal sentiments. Even within a dictatorship that eroded Guinean women's rights, Ada's rebellion enables an insight into the paucity of channels available to women who wanted to challenge the loss of their autonomy over their bodies.

The Nguema government's inheritance of the legacies of colonial power manipulated it and aggravated social, political and economic conditions within the country. Independence did not bring freedom to this country. Instead, the new Guinean president and his allies merely occupied the vacuum the Spanish administration created and were even more brutal in governing their fellow citizens. In response, *Los poderes de la tempestad* reiterates the urgent

need for true independence for Equatorial Guinea, one that considers the country's history objectively, free from dominant cultural and political forces.

6 CHAPTER 6: INSCRIBING AFRICAN ORALITY IN *ARDE EL MONTE DE NOCHE*

6.1 The Spanish Language in *Arde el monte de noche*

The language of contemporary postcolonial African literatures is riddled with various tensions that have their genesis in the colonial experience.²⁴ The variety of linguistic modifications that African writers have made to the Europhone novel is indicative of the diverse responses to the problem of writing African narratives in a foreign language.²⁵ However, Equatorial Guinean writers tend to distance their writings from everyday Spanish, and many of their texts do not reflect the linguistic modifications that Spanish has undergone in this Sub-Saharan contact zone (Ambadiang 55-6).²⁶ Exponential critic, Théophile Ambadiang, has concluded that this exclusion of Guinean Spanish can be attributed

²⁴ These tensions emanate from the imposition of foreign languages as the medium of writing and creative expression under colonialism, and the interference of the writer's native language. As such, these texts attempt to combine African orality with the European narrative writing style. See Gyasi, Kwaku A. "Writing as Translation: African Literature and the Challenges of Translation." (75–87).

²⁵ Many postcolonial authors who write in English, French, and Portuguese modify these languages to transmit African thought and speech patterns as well as reflect the transformations that imperial languages have undergone within non-Western contexts. This phenomenon, as Chinua Achebe argues in his article, "The African Writer and the English Language," constitutes a refashioning of European languages to depict authentic African thought because Western languages in their native formulations cannot fully capture the vitality and the underlying meanings of non-Western cultural expressions (28). See Achebe, Chinua. "English and the African Writer." (27–30), Shelton, Austin J. "The 'Palm-Oil' Of Language Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels." (86–111), and Okara, Gabriel. "African Speech...English Words" (15–16).

²⁶ Théophile Ambadiang observes that there is a difference between the Spanish spoken in the streets of Bata or Malabo and what is represented within the Guinean narrative: "[e] español de la calle se puede describe como un código mixto que si bien basado en la lengua española, presenta una enorme fluctuación e incorpora abundantes términos, expresiones y estructuras de otras lenguas habladas en el territorio y sobre todo de otro código mixto, como es el *pidgin-English* en su variedad local"(56). Although this tendency is widespread, there are a few exceptions in which some novels minimally reflect the modifications to Spanish seen in everyday language. They are Donato Bidyogo-Ndongo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), *Cuando los Combés luchaban* (1953) by Leoncio Evita, and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *Awala cu Sangui* (2000).

historically to the colonial editorial apparatus and, in contemporary times, the Guinean writer's preference for the standard variety spoken in Spain (57).²⁷ As a result, very few Guinean narratives exhibit the tendency observed within other Sub-Saharan African works of literature in deconstructing colonial languages in order to convey African orality, philosophies and speech patterns.

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's work examined in this chapter sets him apart from the other authors discussed so far. In his novel *Arde el monte de noche* (1999), he employs Spanish in a creative way that reflects his Annobonese culture and orality, which results in the reformulation of the novel into an oral tale. The author attempts to indigenize this text by manipulating Spanish lexicon and syntax to mimic his native language and to convey native cultural concepts without making the text inaccessible to the Spanish reader. He achieves this by abrogating specific Spanish words, simulating the rhythm of his native language, and interspersing his narration with untranslated words. His adoption of such a non-conventional writing style restructures the meanings he conveys through the Spanish language and defers its readers to the local culture for signification. According to proponents of postcolonial theory, Ashcroft et al., such textual strategies demonstrate a conscious deviation from standard metropolitan norms (37-8). The strategies that this author uses suggest a deviation that points to a new understanding of scriptural authority in cultural representations of culture

²⁷ During the colonial era, Carlos González Echegaray, who wrote the preface *Cuando los Combés luchaban*, admits taking editorial liberties with Evita's novel: "En cuanto al estilo, he corregido algunas construcciones excesivamente extrañas a nuestra sintaxis y algunos errores de propiedad en la aplicación de los vocablos castellanos, pero he dejado a la obra en su estilo propio, que a las veces puede parecer en la forma, duro, y en el fondo, ingenuo, pero que es una muestra estilizada del castellano medio, hablado por nuestros negros" (Qtd. in Onomo-Abena 228). For more on the colonial editorial apparatus, see Dorothy Odartey-Wellington's "Literary Expressions of Colonialization in the Colonial Press of Equatorial Guinea" (6-16).

from the postcolonial perspective. Even though Ávila Laurel does not reconstruct the Spanish language to the same degree that authors such as Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara have done in their novels, this text registers an attempt at leaving palpable traces of Annobonese language and cultural concepts within a Spanish text.

6.2 Spanish in Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea has been the receptacle of various linguistic influences. This country is home to the Bubi people, who are natives of the island of Fernando Po (now Bioko). The Fang, who inhabit the mainland region of Río Muni, form part of a dialect continuum operative between Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Native Fang speakers number about 624,000, making it the most spoken language, while *pichinglis* has about 76,000 speakers (Yakpo 214). Also, other ethnic groups such as the Ndowé, the Balengue, the Benga, and the Baseke occupy the coastal regions of the mainland.

European presence in this region marks a short but significant paragraph in the linguistic programming of Equatorial Guinea. The partition of Africa in Berlin, between 1884 to 1885, saw the French cede the mainland region of Río Muni, located between the French territories of Cameroon and Gabon, to Spain. However, Spain did not immediately act to take possession of this territory.²⁸ From the second part of the 1800s, the end of the slave trade had diminished the usefulness of African territories for Spain. Between 1827 to 1843, the absence

²⁸ Earlier, the treaty of San Ildefonso in 1778 had ceded commercial rights to Spain in the Bight of Biafra between the Niger and *Ogoue* rivers. In this treaty, the Portuguese exchanged their offshore islands of Fernando Po, Annobón, and the Corisco island for the withdrawal of Spanish claims within the Portuguese colonies of Brazil. However, Spain did not immediately act to claim it until after 1844 (Castro and De la Calle 20). By 1778, Spain was in possession of the island of Fernando Po and used it mainly as a presidio (a mixture of military barracks and prison) during the Cuban wars of independence between 1868 to 1898 (Chira 5).

of Spain presented the opportunity for the English to take up residence on the island of Fernando Po. Under the pretext of combating the slave trade, the British helped populate Fernando Po with former slaves from the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and some freed slaves from Cuba. British presence, although brief, was impactful. Between 1826 and 1832, the establishment of the westernized Fernandinos who embraced the English language, its culture and imperial authority, coupled with intense missionary activity, assented the use of an English-based creole *pichinglis*, a variety still in use in Malabo.

Spanish arrived in Equatorial Guinea as a colonial language and sought to erase traces of English culture. It became the vehicle of Hispanicization, an intense acculturation campaign through which the administration forcefully fed its subjects Spanish religion, language and culture. Spanish occupied a privileged position, which meant that all other Bantu languages were demoted and restricted in the realms of formal education and public administration.²⁹ Contemplating how deeply ingrained the Spanish language and culture was in Equatorial Guinea and fearing the perpetuation of imperialism post-independence, Nguema cut ties with Spain and banned the use of Spanish. The next president, Obiang, reversed this mandate when he overthrew Nguema. He reinstated Spanish again as the official language in 1979. Like most countries on the continent, Equatorial Guinea exercises an exoglossic language policy, which means the use of a non-indigenous language, usually the colonial

²⁹ When Spain officially possessed the island towards the end of the 1800, the colonial administration realized how engrained English culture was in Fernando Po and considered it as a threat to the establishment of Spanish sovereignty. Consequently, it sought to eradicate English influence by introducing a colonial policy that was designed to promote the forceful assimilation of Spanish language through education, religion and public affairs. On May 24, 1907, the colonial administration designates Spanish as the official language of administrative affairs, as the language of evangelization and passing into law, the invalidity of contracts made in other vernacular languages (Rodríguez- Castillo 144).

language, for official functions. Currently, Spanish serves as the medium of formal education and administrative affairs and as a vehicle of interethnic communication among the diverse linguistic groups that form the nation of Equatorial Guinea (Lipski 117-8). Additionally, the constitution recognizes the Annobonese creole, *fa d'ambô* and *pichinglis* as autochthonous languages, although their speakers cannot demand its use in legal or administrative affairs (Gomashie 2).

Thus, Equatorial Guinea's literature is a product of the many cross-cultural encounters which occurred within this region. Characterized as Hispano-Bantu, it rests on hybrid ground and participates in two distinct systems of culture. On the one hand, it is informed by the diversity of Bantu culture and expression. On the other hand, it defers to Spanish, an imposed colonial language that is based on writing. Consequently, this cultural interaction between the Bantu oral text and the written European one is marked by friction or a sort of anthropophagy in which the African oral text devours its Western counterpart (N'gom 2003).³⁰

Given the different African and European languages operating within this country, opting to use Spanish as the predominant medium of literary expression reveals some critical historical and socio-economic considerations that influence this decision. In a survey of the attitudes Guinean authors have towards the Spanish language, Ambadiang notes that Guinean

³⁰ M'bare N'gom borrows this term from the Canadian critic, Fernando Lambert to describe the tensions between opposing narrative traditions and cultures. In these interactions, African oral tradition often "devours" the European text by bringing into it African traditions and its diverse modes of orature. Like many kinds of African literatures, Equatorial Guinean literature descends from this encounter between two traditions, Bantu cultures, which is rooted in a flexible and pragmatic orality and the Spanish text, which is based on writing and rigid linguistic norms (2003). Chantal Zabus also describes this phenomenon as an indigenization of the novel in the sense that there is a simulation of speech habits in African languages in the European language (4-5).

writers' expression of Spanish as native to them manifests a patrimonial relationship towards the Spanish language (53). Equatorial Guinean author and historian, Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, writes that:

Los escritores de Guinea Ecuatorial, africanos y bantúes, expresamos nuestras emociones en lengua española, la cual, si puede considerarse por algunos que nos aísla en el contexto de nuestro entorno geográfico, nos entronca al mismo tiempo con el vasto horizonte de las culturas que se expresan en esa misma lengua, tanto en Europa como en las Américas. (513)

As the author explains, it not only a marker of national identity but establishes Guinea's claim to autonomy, cultural diversity and its connection with the Hispanic world (51-3).³¹ However, the choice of Spanish is a double-edged sword in the sense that while it isolates Guinean writers from their regional African contexts, it incorporates them into the fabric of the global Hispanic community. The events of the immediate postcolonial period also convert this affinity to Spanish into a powerful instrument of resistance against Nguemism retrogressive tribalistic ideals. The Nguema administration imposed the Fang language at various levels of socio-political life. Given this historical antecedent, Equatoguinean authors' choice to use the Spanish language can be read as the means of exercising their freedom of speech, especially for those who saw these freedoms undermined in the former regime (Odartey-Wellington 165-68).

³¹ For Ndong-Bidyogo, the nation's cooptation of Spanish is how Equatorial Guinea distinguishes itself from its West African neighbours who identify as Lusophone Bantu, Francophone Bantu and Anglophone Bantu (Ambadiang 55).

The Spanish literary critic, José Ramón Trujillo, notes that a nation's selection of an official language does not merely fulfil a communicative function. Before linguistic considerations, political, social and economic interests are the deciding factors that drive language planning (861). In Equatorial Guinea, Spanish is a language through which the government pushes for national and international integration, the exchange of scientific information and the assimilation of minority groups within the country who were marginalized during and after colonialism. At the same time, these economic interests may have driven Equatorial Guinea's incorporation into the Francophone monetary zone. In 1997, Guinea made French a co-official language when it joined the francophone financial community. In 2007, it made Portuguese the second co-official language when it joined the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (*Comunidad de Países de Lengua Portuguesa*) as an observer (*Proyecto de Ley Constitucional 2010*).³²

6.3 The Author

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel is one of the prolific contemporary authors who wrote for the most part from Equatorial Guinea. He was born in Malabo in 1966, two years before Equatorial Guinea's independence. He spent a part of his childhood in Annobón, and some of these experiences feature in his novel, *Arde el monte de noche* (2009). For the most part, he grew up under the Nguema regime. In a 2019 documentary on this author and his life, he stated that when Annobón still formed part of Spain, they were forced to speak Spanish and to believe

³² A detailed explanation of Equatorial Guinea's national language policy can be found on the country's official website: <https://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/imgdb/2010/20-7-2010Decretosobreelportuguescomoidiomaoficial.pdf>.

in God. He also added that, under this mandate, they were christened with the names of Spanish cities, and that was how his own name, Ávila Laurel was accorded him.³³

After his education, he worked as a nurse while he pursued writing and took on a few odd jobs to survive. In spite of his criticism of the Guinean government, he remained in his country and was considered the only writer who refused to be forced into exile.

In February 2011, at forty years old, he went on a hunger strike to bring attention to the despotic Obiang regime. This demonstration against the government coincided with official visits by foreign delegations to the country. Due to the political nature of his strike, he became a target for the Obiang administration, and international observers declared it unsafe for him to remain there. Consequently, Ávila Laurel was forced to leave as a political refugee. He is currently in exile in Barcelona, Spain, where he continues to advocate for democracy for his country (Rizo and Shook 42). Furthermore, he is a cyber activist, and through his blog, *Malabo*, he brings attention to the challenges Equatoguineans face under Obiang's administration (Sá 488). In an interview with Elisa Rizo, Ávila Laurel considers his vocation as a writer as one that comes with social responsibility because it positions him to share his views on significant events that have impacted Guineans (Rizo 29). With his forced departure, he joins other writers from Guinea, such as Donato Ndong-Bidyogo and Justo Bolekia Boleká, who were also obliged to flee during the Obiang and Nguema dictatorship respectively.

³³ In the feature documentary, produced by the Spanish documentary film maker Marc Serena entitled *El escritor de un país sin librerías*, Ávila Laurel says “En la escuela, nos obligaban a hablar en español y a creer en Dios...A los de mi isla, nos dieron apellidos de ciudades españolas como Sabadell, Valencia, Santander, Zamora...”

The breadth of Ávila Laurel's works is vast. His literary output to date encompasses a diverse range of poetry, drama, articles and novels. His most notable novels are *La carga* (1999), *Awala cu sangui* (2000), *El desmayo de Judas* (2001) and *Nadie tiene buena fama en este país* (2002). Altogether, these works examine the era of Spanish colonialism and how the inequalities it created morphed into the numerous challenges that Equatorial Guinea faces today. They also reveal the duplicitous motives of the colonial mission, the brutalities of the country's independence regime, and the social and political imprint that both tenures left on the national community.

In Ávila Laurel's works, cultural dialectics take center stage and women, and their experiences often play a significant role in his exposition of the struggles the nation faces. As a result of its focus on lived historical realities, his writings leave little room for myths, legends and other stories emanating from indigenous folklore. Nevertheless, his works are still influenced by his native oral tradition, a skill which he attributes to his upbringing by the older generation. In Elisa Rizo's assessment of his earliest novels, there is a revisionist framework in which Ávila Laurel situates his work. As the author himself admits, it is essential to recognize that there is no singular version of history for both sides of the colonizer and colonized divide. As such, the stories of his community cannot be told within a framework that imposes its ideas on how stories ought to be told (Rizo 30). Consequently, his writings often present the marginalization of the Annobonese community from national discourses. In the same vein, it draws attention to the heterogeneity of the national landscape by highlighting his community's linguistic and cultural differences from the rest of the country. In this way, Ávila Laurel's works respond to the government's attempt to homogenize the country's

national identity through its claims of a common Bantu and Hispanic origin (Cusack 212-4).

Rizo again observes that:

La inclusión de lenguas y sistemas simbólicos extra- oficiales del contexto actual guineano en sus universos literarios parecen reclamar la legitimación de diversas colectividades, negadas o discriminadas desde tiempos coloniales. El resultado es la representación de una sociedad que rebate, consciente o inconscientemente, la agenda oficial de la constitución de un nacionalismo guineano exclusivista. (2005: 176)

Ávila Laurel's works place at the forefront of its diachronic examination Guinea, the agency of its people in the face of the political interests of both the national government and external forces whose economic interests continue to interfere in the trajectory of Equatorial Guinea negatively.

6.4 *Arde el monte de noche*

Arde el monte de noche is set on the island of Annobón. It is an account of life on the island through the eyes of an unnamed little boy who lives in the capital, Palé. Although it does not give specific dates nor follow a chronological sequence, it is evident that the events it describes happened during Nguema's presidency. It is a text which centers primarily on the narrator's life and reflects heavily on personal and communal identity from a cultural standpoint. The narrator grows up with his siblings, his mothers and his grandparents, with the whereabouts of their fathers unknown to them. Their house, which faces away from the sea, and a grandfather who does not participate in the island's cultural life, provoke immense curiosity in the child. Due to the island's geographical and political marginalization from the rest of the country and the African continent, life on the island is marked by material

deprivations, forcing the islanders to depend predominantly on the sea for sustenance. Basic amenities such as soap, kerosene and medicinal supplies are scarce. A cholera outbreak occurs, taking the lives of about a hundred people. In the absence of a proper medical response to this outbreak, the villagers turn to their religions, both Catholic and indigenous, hoping for a spiritual intervention to curb the epidemic. One day, two sisters inadvertently set fire to their farm. Unfortunately, this fire spreads and destroys the crops of other farmers. This incident sparks the outrage of the islanders. Unable to cope with both the Cholera epidemic and the loss of food crops, the villagers, mainly the menfolk, blame the mother of the two women who started the fire and lynched her to death in front of the Catholic mission house. Shortly after, another woman is accused of witchcraft and is beaten to death by a mob of mostly men. This novel shows the effects of this isolation on the entire population. However, it pays particular attention to how women bore twice the brunt of this situation by virtue of their gender.

6.5 Lexical Abrogation

Arde el monte de noche is a narrative that is informed by Annobonese creole.³⁴ The narrator explains that Spanish was not the native language of the islanders, and he refers to it as a language imposed on his community through formal education and Catholicism (167). In Ávila Laurel's novel, abrogation is a vehicle through which Annobonese social perceptions

³⁴ Annobonese creole, also known as *fa d'ambô* is a Portuguese-lexified creole whose emergence was shaped by the transatlantic slave trade. Ferraz theorizes that *fa d'ambô* comes from the proto creole of the Portuguese islands in the Gulf of Guinea (São Tomé and Príncipe). Its substratum is mainly from *Kikongo* and other Bantu languages. According to Bartens, it is one of the more archaic creoles that descended from the second generation of the São Tomé variant (732). In 2013, Post estimated the number of *fa d'ambô* native speakers to be between 4,500 and 5,000 speakers on the island, half of whom are also bilingual in Spanish (81).

are communicated. Postcolonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define abrogation as “the refusal of the categories of imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard or normative or ‘correct’ usage and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning inscribed in the words” (37). For them, abrogation and appropriation are often textual strategies that the postcolonial writer relies on to reflect the real manner of speaking of groups marginalized from the metropolitan center (37-8). In this text, specific Spanish lexicon is populated with indigenous meaning in order to capture its implications within the local context fully. For instance, the narrator uses the word “completa” to signify female virginity. Here, the conventional meaning attached to the word “complete,” that is, finishing an assigned task, has been de-semanticized to refer to the sexually inexperienced state of a woman:

Pues que un hombre joven vino llorando de su casa porque se acababa de ir a vivir con su mujer, y vino a quejarse porque la mujer no era *completa*... Lo que me dijeron fue que lamentó, y por eso vino llorando del otro extremo del pueblo donde vivía hasta nuestra casa, porque la mujer no era *completa*. Fue lo que llegó a mis oídos. En realidad, dijeron algo en nuestra lengua que puedo traducir por aquella palabra. (182-3)³⁵

In this extract, it seems plausible to replace the word “completa” with “virgen.” However, the narrator does not translate *completa* as *virgen* probably because it proves inadequate in capturing Annobonese social perception of female sexuality before marriage. This constitutes an instance of creative cultural translation that enables an approximation in understanding the gendered undertones wired into this word. In this context, one can infer that

³⁵ The word being discussed is not italicized in the original text. It is only highlighted in this discussion for emphasis.

female sexuality was a matter of family honour, and its loss, especially at a pre-marital date, carried unpleasant consequences for the woman and her family. In translating this concept, “completa” is emptied of its original meaning in Spanish and made to take on a gendered meaning in relation to female sexuality. Subsequently, “no completa” infuses the state of not being a virgin with a specific social implication that may differ from how female loss of virginity may be perceived in Hispanic cultures.

When the narrator finally understood the story of the man who lamented that his wife was not a virgin, he makes this confession: “Cuando me enteré de la verdadera «carne» de aquella historia, me reí mucho.” (183). “Carne,” in this context, is a literal translation from an oral paradigm of speech, referred to as calquing, a technique commonly used by African writers in the Europhone novel (Zabus 120). While it no longer means “meat” in this extract, it can refer to the crux of the matter or the real conflict in a complex situation. This imagery can be linked to the island’s dependence on the sea for sustenance, making meat a highly valued commodity. On the one hand, incorporating this word points to the untranslatability of specific speech patterns from the native language. On the other hand, it indicates the desire to retain elements of indigenous thought in the target language. However, “carne” imports from Annobonese creole into Spanish an indigenous aesthetic of speech through which it expresses the notion of understanding the real complexity in a situation. In another example, the narrator uses “pesadez” to describe the malicious aura that certain older women, who were suspected of being she-devils or witches were believed to have: “Pero no siempre las malignas se dejan ver... En nuestra isla, cualquier mujer mayor que estuviera seguida por una maligna a cierta distancia se daría cuenta, sentiría la «pesadez» de la espalda y se haría a un lado para darle paso” (128). In this citation, “pesadez” carries connotations of the negativity attached to such

encounters with these women more than it does a sense of heaviness. Again, in this example, the normative meanings attached to “pesadez,” such as weight, heaviness or the feelings of it, are truncated and made to take on a more cultural meaning within the text.

In these examples, the boundaries of Spanish lexicon are pushed to accommodate indigenous speech and their underlying implications within the local context. This also marks a conscious deviation from normative Spanish to bring native words, albeit translated, and to represent their underlying connotations vividly in Spanish. African languages are receptacles of indigenous culture, and to omit the symbolism contained within it would be to truncate their true significance.³⁶ The sociolinguist, Zabus points to such specific acts of making the text local as indigenization. She defines this as the writer’s strategy to decolonizing the postcolonial narrative by “textualizing linguistic differentiation and conveying African concepts, through patterns and linguistic features through the ex-colonizer’s language” (3).

Indigenization not only textualizes linguistic and cultural differences but links particular texts to specific cultural milieus. While it recognizes the geographical scope and political weight of the dominant language, it also attests to its inability to fully express culturally specific meanings encoded within African speech and thought. In this process, the text uses familiar words in the dominant language to convey an unfamiliar message, which can only fully be deciphered in reference to the context, culture or the writer’s native language (111). While leaving a tangible trace of Annobonese lexicon, albeit translated into Spanish, this adaptation creates a palimpsest from which indigenous traces of language, culture and

³⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues in *Decolonizing the Mind* that African languages are a reservoir of images, proverbs, riddles, and ballads and stories (9).

speech refuse to be erased. This grounds the text in a particular ethnic, social or linguistic identity without hindering the text's accessibility cross-culturally.

Ávila Laurel's transposition of traditional thought into the European written genre is one of the elements that differentiate the modern African Europhone novel from its European counterpart and represents its push against the limitations of the conventional language. These conditions mark the text as a translation from the narrator's mother tongue into Spanish. In these examples, the target language has to make room to accurately and vividly convey specific expressions and ideas that do not exist within it. These words and phrases, divorced from their conventional meanings within Hispanic culture, are used to represent thought patterns in the source language that cannot fully be captured within the equivalent lexicon available in Spanish. Thus, it deflects from normative significance and obliges the reader to defer to the social context within the novel for the full meaning.

6.6 African Speech... Spanish Words

In her book chapter, "Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation," Maria Tymoczko notes that postcolonial writing and translation converge in a few ways. However, she observes that "the transmission of elements from one culture to another across a linguistic or cultural gap is a central concern of both these types of intercultural writing and similar constraints on the process of relocation affect both types of text" (22). Similarly, for Kwaku Gyasi, postcolonial writings, whether unconscious or overt, engage in some level of translation. He argues that "our reading of postcolonial texts must, of necessity, locate these texts within the broad perspective of translation. If we understand African literature as an instrument of cultural production, then we must see translation as a crucial dimension of this literature, especially the part that finds expression in European languages" (144). It is

precisely in this convergence of writing and translation that the European language is appropriated to express the cultural experiences and speech of non-Western cultures. Appropriation within postcolonial studies hinges on a literary translation that attempts to “convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (Rao vii).

In *Arde el monte de noche*, the narrator makes clear that the language that informs the story is a language other than Spanish, and the ensuing narrative suggests a simultaneous process of translation and appropriation. Appropriation refers to how postcolonial writers construct their texts to reflect the cultural experiences of the formerly colonized. As Ashcroft et al. put it, Western language is adopted as a tool of narrative expression and made to bear the burden of one’s cultural experiences (38). Acts of appropriation gave way to the birth of multiple varieties of “Englishes,” which bear witness to the cross-cultural nature of postcolonial texts. This strategy is also one of cultural assertion in that it displays a linguistic distinctiveness that reflects indigenous systems of thought and speech.

The narrator in this novel describes the fisherman transporting a woman and her sick child, Luis Mari, as having courage and showing skill in the face of a turbulent sea: “Aligeró las manos, cogió su corazón, que es una manera de hablar en nuestra isla, y fue empujado a la mar” (199). From this extract, one can glean that some folklore or indigenous philosophy undergirds the notion of having courage when faced with difficult circumstances. As Gabriel Okara argues, the speech acts recuperated by African writers who write in European languages must vividly capture the imagery within it because its historical and cultural connotations infuse it with the broader meaning that it holds in its native context (16). The fisherman’s actions, based on the phrases “aligerar las manos” and “coger el corazón,” refer specifically to how courage and skill are perceived in the Annobonese context and links them to aspects

of the worldview contained within this culture. This manner of simulating African speech with Spanish words not only textualizes linguistic difference but pushes the semantic limitations within the Spanish language to make room for Annobonese concepts. Here, indigenous creole overshadows the dominant language, and it is reduced to function solely as a medium through which this message is communicated. Thus, Spanish is stripped of its hegemonic power and appropriated to mimic African speech, thereby grounding the text in Annobonese identity.

In another example, the author uses the mediated arena of literature to project local beliefs about the dead: “Se nos decía que si el aire del entierro, «el aire del muerto» tocaba a los niños, nos mataba, y se los llevaría como se llevaba al que llevaban a enterrar” (40). This is not an uncommon belief in many African cultures because death is seen as a transition into another life. Among African people, there are specific attitudes and thoughts towards the dead:

Death is conceived as a departure and not a complete annihilation. He, the dead, moves on to join the company of the departed, and the only major change is the decay of the physical body, but the spirit moves on to another state of existence. Some of the words describing death imply that the dead simply goes ‘home’ indicating that his ‘lived’ life is but a pilgrimage: the real ‘home’ is in the hereafter since one does not depart from there. (Mbiti 205-06)

While this explanation is similar to Western Judeo- Christian thoughts of life after death, the dead, in many African cultures, still make themselves symbolically visible or return

to interact with the living.³⁷ The situation presented in the novel attempts to establish notions of the danger attached to the aura of the dead for children. The belief that the spirit of the dead continually hovers around and that children are the most vulnerable and susceptible to death is actively communicated in this extract. Thus, “el aire del muerto” may refer to the appearance of the spirit of the dead person, operating with the power to claim the lives of children. Although this concept is not explored fully, this illustrates the gap between the target language and the source culture.

Reflecting indigenous language and the concepts that it encapsulates hinges on translation, a creative fashioning of these ideas in the target language in a way that does not gloss over its cultural meaning. In these examples, the author’s use of Spanish gives veracity and vitality to the Spanish text through its incorporation of local speech. However, these speech patterns do more than fulfill a communicative function but marks the narrative with Annobonese identity. As the Nigerian critic Solomon Iyasere notes, appreciating modern African literature requires the understanding that such literature is rooted in the past even when it is “eternally present” (52). Far from being simple simulations of native language, speech acts in these works of literature are culturally and historically charged with meanings that can fully be decoded in relation to the social and cultural context of the narrative.

6.7 African Oral Tradition... Spanish Text

Arde el monte de noche explores the relationship between the underlying oral tradition and the Spanish mode of narration, the text. This is especially significant because the novel,

³⁷ Among ethnic groups such as the Fang people, *mibili* is the art of invoking dead people and speaking with them. In the previous novel discussed in this thesis, Patricio, Father Gabriel’s dead friend makes an appearance through Ndong, another character who is a practitioner of the traditional arts. See *El Párroco de Niefang* (70).

as a genre, has no antecedent in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sullivan 180).³⁸ However, oral tradition predates European contact and still is a source of rich collections of history, folklore and songs. Therefore, the critic of modern African literature must possess a historical sense pertaining to African literature. This entails both knowledge of oral influences and an investigation of their place in contemporary fiction (Iyasere 52). Techniques of African orature, which Ngugi describes as the African oral text, such as the conception and ontological flow of time, the absence of strong character delineation, the loose narrative structure and other features are not failures to grasp the European textual narrative form but are all characteristics of traditional verbal art (1999). These shape the writer's imagination and articulation and give form and veracity to their stories. Through its incorporation into the text, these writers liberate their narratives from the constraints of a predominant Eurocentric novelistic purview. This, in turn, shows one of the ways in which African writers have converted the conventional form of the novel to produce literature that responds to their peculiar oral tradition.

Arde el monte de noche is one of such texts. Although it is written in Spanish, its narrative aesthetic springs from the narrator's oral tradition, thereby blending the Spanish textual norm with Annobonese oral tradition. As such, its narrative pattern reflects an orature

³⁸ Sullivan is of the view that "Although the concept of the novel was introduced to Africa through colonial cultural imperialism, the antecedents of the novel, the oral epic and strong writing traditions, had been flourishing throughout the continent for centuries. The adaptation of the novel form, a slow process which began early last century and only began to thrive in the 1960s, has shown enormous variation in style and form. Factors such as colonial education policies, local literary traditions, local power struggles, language competency, and religion have combined to influence and shape national and even subnational literature" (180). Irina Nikiforova shares a similar view and states that these conditions "are grounds to believe that a substantial number of African authors took from the West only the very idea of the novel, its key situation, (the depiction of man's fate in complex social conditions), but not its concrete forms" (425).

whose style often results in breaking Spanish norms of punctuation, prose rhythm, resulting in the long combination of sentences, call-and-response actions and the interjection of folksongs. Local oral storytelling techniques are carried into Spanish, and the narrator tells the story as he would speak in his mother tongue.

To begin the story, the narrator simulates a call-and-response context through which he pauses to direct questions at the reader as a way of engaging with them and orienting the narrative: “¿Alguien sabe lo que es? Es una cosa que ocurre en mi isla, situada un poquito abajo del Ecuador” (11) ... ¿Y sabe alguien cómo se empieza haciendo un cayuco? (12) ... ¿Sabe alguien cómo se saca del bosque metido el cayuco a medio esbozar?” (15). This call-and-response technique entails a storyteller who raises a song or pauses throughout the story to pose questions to his or her listeners. Often, the audience responds with answers, comments, questions or interjections of their own. This exists to encourage participation in communal activities such as storytelling and its associated arts. This technique is even more pronounced in the song that the narrator raises intermittently. In this extract, the community elder raises a song as the men of the island pull a newly made canoe to the shore:

La canción empezaba así:

Maestro: *Alee, tire usted un poco*

Todos: ¡*Alewa!*

Maestro: *Aaaalee, tire usted un poco*

Todos: ¡*Alewa!*

— *Aaale, toma suguewa.*

— ¡*Alewa!*

— *Aaale, toma suguewa.*

— ¡*Alewa!* (11)

In this extract, the narrator relies on an Annobonese folksong, which is a work-song, to dramatize the interrelation between the members of the community and their environment. So, too does it show the role music plays in communal work. In this segment, the *Maestro*, who is an elderly man, but also the one who carved the canoe out of the fallen tree, respectfully encourages the villagers to pull the finished canoe to the shore. Although elders are generally accorded respect among many African communities, this song emphasizes the horizontal structure around which Annobonese society is organized.³⁹ In this novel, Ávila Laurel shows how the island's isolation and its dependence on the sea reinforce the necessity of interdependence among the villages around the island in order to survive.

This text also mimics African storytelling in the way that it intersperses the narrative with singing. The work-song that the islanders sing in pulling the cayuco to the shore is repeated within the text a few times (195, 196, 207). These musical interludes derive from indigenous African story-telling techniques that tend to draw in the audience's participation.

³⁹ Although aspects of Spanish social hierarchy still remain, this depiction of the social structure on the island is contrary to the vertical structure introduced. According to Fra Baltasar Molinero, colonialism brought into Equatorial Guinea the concept of a vertical social structure through its imposition of the Catholic faith and a civil rights hierarchy that permitted social ascension depending on how much the African subject had assimilated Iberian civilization. The Church and the State both spurred the disempowerment of traditional local authorities, fostering inequalities where horizontal structures of society once existed (118).

Whenever this song is invoked, all town members are actively engaged in pulling a canoe to the shore. However, the repetition of the song breaks from the prose and points to the repetitive and cyclical nature of life on the island. For the islanders, very little has changed since independence. Life is still marked by material deprivations, and despite their reliance on the sea for sustenance, it is also their biggest obstacle. It is the reason for their isolation from the rest of the continent and occasionally proves dangerous for the inhabitants.

Iñeke Phaf-Rheinberger argues that the sea in *Arde el monte de noche* represents not only isolation but stagnation (59). Indeed, this song and its link to the cayuco reinforces that notion of a never-ending cycle. When Luis Mari, one of the children on the island, falls seriously ill and needs urgent medical attention, this song echoes throughout the entire village while they pull the canoe to the shore: “Y retumbaban los ecos de aquella canción por todos los bosques, por todos los rincones de aquel pueblo... Todos buscaban la costa con sus fuerzas” (196). In addition to its musical function, the narrator uses this song to show the islanders’ complex relationship with the sea.⁴⁰

The rhythm of the prose also points to indigenous influences. These are aspects of the text in which the narrator’s unending tale breaks with Western norms of punctuation within prose writing. This often results in long combinations of sentences: Although he does not entirely ignore punctuations in creating his prose, these omissions recreate the tone of indigenous oral lore. Novelists like Amos Tutola bring what the Indian Linguist Braj B.

⁴⁰ In *Awalá cu Sangui*, (2000), another novel by the same author, which is set in Annobón, within the same time period, a sick woman, María is being transported for medical attention by sea but because of the strong waves, she died in the same manner that her husband, who also went to sea and never returned (44). It seems that the fate of the villagers is always tied to the sea.

Kachru refers to as the “interminable tale,” a narrative style that stems from the Yoruba way of speaking (163). This extract from Tutola’s novel, *Bush of Ghosts* (1954) illustrates this:

When he tried all his power for several times and failed and again at the moment the smell of the gun-powder of the enemies’ gun which were shooting repeatedly was rushing to our noses by the breeze and this made us fear more, so my brother lifted me again a very short distance, but when I saw that he was falling several times, then I told him to leave me on the road and run away for his life perhaps he might be safe so that he would take care of our mother as she had no other sons than both of us and I told him that if God saves my life too then we should meet again, but if God does not save my life we should meet in heaven. (20)⁴¹

In a similar vein, the narrator’s interminable tale, the rhythm of his prose and the brief pauses within the text suggest a narrative dictated by the norms of indigenous verbal art rather than the norms of textual prose. Thus, it recuperates in Spanish, the conventions of oral lore, which in turn gives form to the Spanish prose:

Hechas las operaciones dichas arriba, y con la mayor parte del trabajo técnico sin hacer, el cayuco sigue en el bosque o lejos de la costa en el mismo sitio del derribo del árbol; hay que trasladarlo a la costa para que allí, cerca de donde se rompen las olas, y con el sabor de ellas, cerca de donde todos los hombres pudieran ver el trabajo y decidir sobre él, el maestro elegido terminara de darle forma y sacara a la luz de la

⁴¹ According to Nigerian critic Oladele Taiwo, Amos Tutola exhibits writing features which are uniquely Nigerian. He argues that this novel has carried the speech habits of the writer’s native language Yoruba into English, and the rhythms created in this text are of those of Yoruba speech (76).

admiración de todos los hombres un cayuco que agradece la buena mano de su maestro. (14)

The text here simulates live speech by shirking off the imposed authority within the system of writing, which emanates from the colonizer's culture. European colonial contact highlighted the vulnerability of oral cultures faced with the domination of literacy. It fostered a system of writing as a mode of communication. This not only controlled the medium of communication but what can be communicated and how it must be done. The introduction of writing into subjugated communities enabled the development of a kind of historical consciousness (Ashcroft et al. 79 -81). Literacy, while it destroyed the immediacy of personal experience and the totalizing nature of oral cultures, led to the development of fixed narratives, both historical and literary. Narratives such as this one resist the universality of the codes of communication inherent within the imperial language. Authors proceed to use their texts to rupture these writing conventions by inscribing within that writing tradition symbols and codes of communication derived from their subjugated native community.

In this text, there is a palpable sense of the rejection of the discursal thought pattern and flow of language inherent within the European language. The writer's recuperation of native oral lore lies at the juncture between the recreation of his indigenous oral lore in Spanish and a creative appropriation of the linguistic norms within the language. Nevertheless, its purpose is to maintain semantic fidelity to his native creole. As such, readers are thrown into an experience where they engage with two texts at once; one that provides the words, and another that guides the rhythm, flow and tone of the story.

6.8 Between the Glossed and the Untranslated

One recourse the text uses to assert its cultural distinctiveness is the use of glossed words that appear in the native language of the author. However, the short description that accompanies these new words does not capture its entire socio-cultural implications in the source culture. Although glossed, these words function very much like untranslated words in that it relies on the context to explore its full meaning. As a result, a discussion of these words will defer to theoretical views on the untranslated word within the postcolonial text.

Ávila Laurel's narrative brings into focus words that cannot easily be translated because of their remoteness to Western culture. That is, there is no direct equivalent in Spanish, which can accurately convey the socio-cultural significance that these terms hold within their place of origin. As a result, these words remain untranslated and depend on the development of the plot for its definition, expansion and to fully explore the meanings these concepts have within the island's culture. Annobonese words that make their way into the text are few, and they are immediately followed with a brief definition, which is increasingly amplified as the story progresses. For instance, the novel describes *jambab'u* as a green shrub which is used for roofing when dried (21), *pámpan'a* is the name for a flat type of fish within that side of the Atlantic seas (46), the *vidjil*, a small house on the beach where the fishermen meet (32), and the *Maté Jachín* is an object which represents the African deity that the islanders worship.

This phenomenon of the untranslated word described as “the technique of selective lexical fidelity” introduces indigenous words into a European language text and leaves these words to be defined by their context (Ashcroft et al. 63). Within early colonial discourse, presumably between the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries of colonial occupation, the

untranslated word in colonial texts emphasized the debasement of the subjugated community and also disrupted transcultural continuity, despite potentially shared transcultural traits (Said 98). Within the context of asymmetrical political relations, untranslated words represent what was held from translation, that is, the translator's refusal to familiarize Western audiences with the target culture. This mechanism against a transcultural affiliation reinforced alterity, exoticization and ultimately influenced the West's justification for political domination (Niranjana 11). Late colonial discourse, around the nineteenth century, however, differed slightly in its use of untranslated words. European writers used non-Western words and concepts in peripheral languages like Hindi and Urdu to communicate their orientalist knowledge to the metropole. In this manner, Europeans writing from the Orient positioned themselves to represent and define its thoughts, not only to Western Europe but to the colonized themselves.

However, Ashcroft et al. argue that the insistence on the part of the writer in using untranslated words holds an interpretative function and stems from the notion that cultural difference is not inherent in the text but must be inserted (61-3). Thus, the untranslated word is an active agent of cultural representation, a signifier of cultural distinctiveness, and a marker of postcolonial discourse. Additionally, this implies that the language which informs the novel is one other than the language of literary expression. As a result, the narrator's refusal to gloss these words obliges an active engagement with the culture in which these terms have meaning. These diverse viewpoints converge in illustrating how untranslated words in Ávila Laurel's narrative are used to represent Annobonese cultural institutions and all their affiliated associations from an inner perspective.

6.8.1 Decoding Vidjil and Maté Jachín

In *Arde el monte de noche*, the concept of the vidjil is carefully expanded from merely being a geographical location and morphs into the island's regulatory body. The child narrator describes this place as he questions his grandfather's isolation from the rest of the islanders: "por qué no iba al *vidjil*, esa casa de recreo que los hombres tenían al borde de la playa?" (32). Isabel de Aranzadi describes the vidjil as an open hut situated on the beach facing the direction of the sea, a place where the men meet to talk after working (818). This is similar to the *abaha*, the "casa de la palabra" or a council house, a Fang denomination for a large hut where the village men gather to discuss communal issues (Nsüie-Angue 19). The narrator uses the remaining context of the novel to expand on the cultural significance of the vidjil for the reader, otherwise unfamiliar with this term. The term vidjil moves from being a simple hut into the most important institution on the island:

Ocurre que en aquella isla del mar de Atlante los que arribaban la pesca de era ayudados para subir el cayuco por los hombres que se encontraban en el *vidjil*, y como muestra de buen pescador, y para que la tradición nuestra siguiera siendo algo dinámico, daban unos pescados a los hombres que le hubieran ayudado. Pero en los *vidjiles*, hay viejos que ya no pueden ni quieren levantarse para ayudar a arrastrar el cayuco, aunque algunos de estos, faltos de vigor juvenil, se levantan cuando llega un cayuco de la pesca y mientras los fuertes arrastran el cayuco, ellos solamente lo tocan, y hacen notar que lo han tocado, y con ello, se inscriben en la lista del reparto del atado de agradecimiento. (33)

In this extract, vidjil is associated with communal sharing. In the text, this term becomes synonymous with an institution that caters to the elderly fishermen by ensuring they had fish

for their families and fulfilled their roles as men. Thus, the *vidjil* existed to provide sustenance for those older fishermen who no longer had the strength to go out to sea.

The author's use of this term also explores the relationship that the different genders maintained with this institution. The *vidjil* was a site of gendered discrimination. Its operations solely reflected its recognition of the challenges of the menfolk, ignoring that women bore twice the brunt of the mishaps that the islanders faced. When the narrator reflects on the injustice meted out to the women accused of witchcraft, he tacks down the discrimination they faced to their alienation from the realms of power and decision-making: "Sé que en este mundo no es lo mismo que algunas personas tengan la culpa de las cosas graves que acaecen en las Comunidades donde viven. Sé que el juicio de los hechos depende de los que están involucrados en ellos. Todo esto aprendí más tarde, cuando vi las cosas que ocurrieron en aquella isla del mar de Atlante" (64). According to Florencio Villahute Pelayo, an Annobonese informant in a short documentary produced by Equatorial Guinea's Ministry of Culture in 2018, the *vidjil* was a place where only the older men in the community gathered. Women were never allowed there, except under extenuating circumstances. It existed principally for resolving communal conflicts and for discussing the challenges that the community encountered at large. This observation is echoed by the narrator in *Arde el monte de noche* when one of the female villagers, Toín's wife, is attacked by a mob:

Entonces los hombres que había en aquel *vidjil* vieron lo que podía pasar, no dijeron nada ni se interpusieron, sino que expulsaron de su sitio a aquella mujer. No salieron en su defensa. Sí, se refugió en el interior del *vidjil* buscando la protección de su marido y de los compañeros de él, pero los hombres la expulsaron de allá y se quedó sola frente a la maldad de sus perseguidores... (123)

The *Maté Jachín* is also another indigenous word that is too remote to be translated into Spanish. Through its use, the author accesses a cache of indigenous religious practices. In addition to positioning the author to represent and define the island's religious thought, it functions as a marker of cultural distinction. The author assumes the role of an interpreter to aptly convey the significance of this term or entity for the audience who may not be familiar with the tenets of the island's African religion. The *Maté Jachín* is the representation of their beliefs: "Nunca supe lo que era el *Maté Jachín*, pero sabía que era el centro de nuestra fuerza, la cosa más auténtica, sagrada y poderosa de nuestra isla. De él sabían, y solamente lo sabían ellos, los sacristanes. Sé que el *Maté Jachín* era algo envuelto en un paño, algo en el que creí ver la silueta de una cruz" (96). Exact depictions of the *Maté Jachín* are shrouded in mystery, but the narrator explains its functions with precision. This object symbolizes the island's indigenous religious beliefs and the islanders invoke the spirit it carries during challenging times. Even when glossed, this untranslatable word demonstrates that specific beliefs and religious concepts are immutable to translation, and the postcolonial author conveys this immutability to the target audience. Consequently, questions of authority and alterity are once again invoked when considering the relationship between Spain and its former colony, Annobón.

Tymoczko argues that "the use of rare or untranslated words in translations and the inclusion of unfamiliar cultural material are not necessary defects of translated texts: translation is one of the activities of a culture in which cultural expansion occurs and in which linguistic options are expanded through the importation of loan transfers, calques, and the like" (23). Glossed words, which function like untranslated words in this text, are agents of cultural representation that explore the full significance of their affiliated meanings within the

source culture. It represents and defines Annobonese thoughts on its regulatory institutions while it explores its relationships with the different members of this society.

Within postcolonial writings, untranslated words are not easily characterized. This is because postcolonial writings in European languages are considered translations that compromise between representing the source culture accurately and have to bear in mind the literary norms of the target audience. As a result, the postcolonial author is simultaneously straddling the roles of writer and translator. However, this writer's mastery of the dominant language underlines his or her choice to maintain indigenous words in their semiotic framework as political. This phenomenon suggests that postcolonial writers who write in the former colonizer's language have a new understanding of discursive authority and the representation of otherness in postcolonial discourse. The writer who operates from the non-Western world strategically positions his or her writings as a greater authority of a particular culture. In this manner, the author taps into the full repository of cultural knowledge and explores the multiple meanings of these words and their place within their indigenous communities. This strategy most often counters the information contained within the colonial archives, overturning its assumptions and asserting their people's right to define and represent themselves culturally and politically.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the creative ways in which this novel subverts colonial discourse on language to affirm its cultural identity and authority. It has analyzed the strategies it uses to abrogate and appropriate Spanish in non-conventional ways in order to leave its aesthetic imprint within the text. The examples discussed show that the syntactic and lexical influences

on the Spanish language borrow directly from African thought and speech patterns. Through its use of new forms and the injection of linguistic speech patterns, this novel textualizes linguistic difference by leaving tangible traces of the author's native language within the text. It also demonstrates the insufficiency of Spanish to accurately portraying Annobonese worldview.

Even so, *Arde el monte de noche* is not a text that reconstructs the Spanish language at the same level that writers like Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara have done with the English language. It has been argued that these writers have essentially "igbo-lized" and "ijaw-ified" English, respectively.⁴² Even though it expresses its cultural messages through new formulations of the Spanish language, it does not cement the use of these structures through repetition. Its attempts at grounding the text in Annobonese identity shine the light back on the creative use of European languages, in this case, Spanish within Equatorial Guinean works of literature and prompts the need for more analysis into the ways in which Guinean authors appropriate the language to establish their Hispano-Bantu identities textually.

⁴² Chinua Achebe refashions English to adapt to his native Igbo language, and Gabriel Okara has also shown to do the same with his mother tongue, Ijaw.

7 CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have discussed the various expressions of resistance emanating from three novels of the post-independence period. These novels, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) by Donato Ndong-Bidyogo, *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) by Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel all represent unique voices that push back against the oppression Guinean society has been subjected to. Given that Equatorial Guinea's historical trajectory has been profoundly marked by Spanish colonialism and Nguema's dictatorship, there were always questions about how Guinean writers have reacted to the colonial legacies and Nguemism through their writings. As such, this thesis has attempted to compile into one body the varied and diverse forms of resistance within the works of these authors. The dissertation has attempted to answer the following questions: How do these texts denounce socio-political domination emanating from colonialism and the dictatorship? Through what discourses do these authors assert their individual and social identity? How do their works challenge hegemonic ideologies emanating from colonial discourse and from the nation-state? Does their resistance lie in their ability to challenge state-sanctioned ideologies? What function do these narratives perform, given the history of the nation? Does their resistance also lie in a commitment to their ideals of freedom for Guineans?

The postcolonial theoretical framework of resistance presented a fruitful point of departure for analyzing the novels selected for this study. This is because resistance theories provide a broad engagement with colonial and postcolonial histories, and this enabled various positions to emerge within the discussions presented in this thesis. In this study, Resistance is defined not only as a collective endeavour with a politicized agenda but as everyday acts of defiance intended to assert the individual's right to freedom. It also encompasses a discursive

subversion of the dominant ideological paradigms. Its object of enquiry is not only the present but also interrogates how European colonialism in Africa, for example, had a hand in the socio-political problems that these nations face today. Engaging with postcolonial literature through the prism of resistance, therefore, provided a nuanced analysis of the challenges that different groups within the national community experience and how they assert their autonomy. Within this framework, the nation-state is also discussed as an institution that failed to decolonize effectively. In addition to its diachronic dimension, this approach permitted an analysis of the intersections of resistance with gender, class, history, hybridity, religion, and literature.

Furthermore, these novels are united by their intertextualities with the nation's history as well as their autobiographical inferences. The stories are contextualized within pivotal moments of national history and these authors represent how they and their families were impacted by them. This blend of history, autobiography and fiction shows the intertwined nature of post-independence literature with contemporary discussions of Equatorial Guinea's liberation, effective decolonization and self-determination. Another factor common to these novels was that these writers were born under colonialism and have been impacted by it to some degree. These authorial voices are critical of this enterprise and highlight how it contributed in fostering some of the challenges that the country continues to face. Currently, their refusal to align with the Obiang regime, alongside their criticism of this government, has made them detractors of his administration. With the political nature of their writings and their activism, they have been forced to remain in exile abroad, where they continue their advocacy for their country's democratization.

The novels discussed within this thesis were all published between 1996 to 2009. These novels were chosen based on their thematic alignment within the framework of resistance. They also belong to a period of Guinean letters that the Spanish critic Ramón Trujillo refers to as “los años de la esperanza” (882). This period represents an influx of a new generation of Guinean writers who have all been impacted by the post-independence dictatorship in some way. In a sense, these authors break the literary silence associated with Guinean intellectuals who were in exile during the dictatorship. Their works engage with the socio-political challenges emanating from this period. As such, this generation of writers responds to the violence of colonialism and the dictatorship by advocating for a democratization of the Guinean political system.

This study makes several contributions to the study of contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature by exploring the different ways in which the works published within this time frame resist nguemist and colonial ideologies. Apart from elevating literary voices from a historically marginalized part of the Hispanic world, it has also brought novel interpretations to these three novels. It has reread these novels in order to articulate how the stories presented within them write or speak against dominant forces. In the process, it has unearthed similarities and also differences in how these writers all advocate for Guinea’s freedom. Globally, these writers all employ a unique discourse through which they refuse to align with Western hegemonic and nguemist ideologies.

The first novel discussed, *El párroco de Niefang*, has gone beyond the scrutiny of the cultural make up of Equatorial Guinea to highlight its anti-colonial and anti-nguemist discourse. My analysis has demonstrated how the author uses the notion of the nation’s hybridity to question the colonizer’s authority to represent them and to challenge their ability

to accurately understand and depict their subjects within the archives. In doing so, the narrator positions himself as a greater authority to represent the Guinean people. Also, this study has gone beyond the recurrent theme of the hybrid nature of Guinean peoples to point out that the differences within the levels of hybridity and the impact of a profound assimilation of Western culture on the individual post-independence.

One of the recurring themes within Equatorial Guinean contemporary literature is its history. My discussions of *Los poderes de la tempestad* in Chapter 5 have shown how the author essentially decenters historical authority from the state. The writer's concern with history, and who constructs the official version reveals how fundamental an objective contemplation of history is to questions of the legitimization of state powers and the representation of the diverse cultural groups within the country. Within this chapter also, another significant contribution is the amplified reading that it applied to the female character, Ada. This study explored what resistance means for people within her social group by critically examining the historical and cultural circumstances that inform her stance on resistance. In this analysis, a complex nexus of anti-patriarchal and anti-colonialist resistance emerged and pointed to the paucity of avenues available to women under this regime as well indicating the presence of women who were allies of Nguema's dictatorship. These readings provide new insight into the intersections of gender, history and class with resistance within the Guinean postcolonial context.

The ways in which Guinean authors establish their cultural identities within the text is rarely discussed. In the study of *Arde el monte de noche*, I explore the strategies through which Ávila Laurel grounds the text in a local identity through abrogation, appropriation and the use of the untranslated word. My study has highlighted how the creative inscription of

fundamental aspects of indigenous African oral paradigm of speech within the Guinean novel can be read as a discursive act of resistance. It has shown how Ávila Laurel simulates Annobonese creole in Spanish and also into the instrumentality of the Guinean novel in representing culture and in asserting scriptural authority.

In the course of this dissertation, it became evident that gender was essential to understanding women's resistance against colonialism and dictatorial regimes. At the time of the conception of this thesis, there was very little study that sufficiently responded to this line of enquiry. The timely publication of *Silenced Resistance: Women, Dictatorships, and Genderwashing in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea* by Dr. Joanna Allan in April 2019 only confirmed that minimal scholarship existed that explored how Guinean women have responded to the erosion of their rights historically. Thus, a potentially interesting research avenue would try to articulate gendered resistance across class and political lines in post-independence Equatorial Guinea.

Furthermore, the political ideologies of the Nguema regime also present another gap within existing scholarship on this regime. Very little information exists on Macías Nguema's alignment with the Soviet Union and its satellites, like North Korea, and the details of their technical and military support, which helped sustain his dictatorship for eleven years. Critics like Olegario Negrín Fajardo have linked certain aspects of Nguemism to possible influences emanating from communist ideologies during the Cold War. At the time of writing this dissertation, very little literature was found that outlines to what extent Nguema was influenced by communism and how this in turn informed his leadership.

The paucity of studies on how Guinean writers use language creatively to describe their cultural experiences and realities is also another area that could potentially add to the growing scholarship on this literature. Except for linguistic studies on the Spanish variant spoken in Equatorial Guinea, discussions of the language used by Guinean writers have focused on the writer's attitude towards the language. However, future research could point to how Guinean texts represent language variation and also how the oral traditions of these native writers influence their narratives.

Overall, this thesis identified the fact that all the authors selected for exploration of the theme of resistance tried to find ways of delegitimizing the imposition of oppressive paradigms of power within their socio-cultural environment. They have tried to express that, despite the departure of the colonial administration, Equatorial Guinea is still not truly independence, and that even after the demise of Macías Nguema, it is still subjected to a different variation of Nguemism. In their own unique ways, they attempt to assert their autonomy and denounce the atrocities committed against their fellow citizens. Through these novels, they have shown the survival of the Guinean people through two oppressive regimes; the colonial and the postcolonial as they attempt to find their place on the African continent and within the global Hispanic context.

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