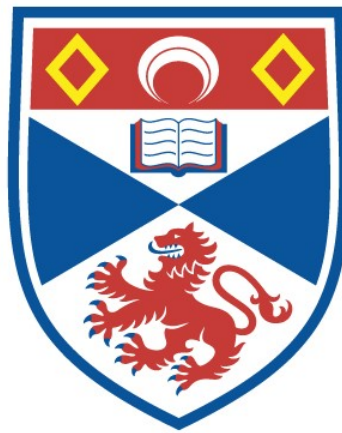


THE EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY IN EQUATORIAL GUINEAN NARRATIVES (1994-2007)

Naomi McLeod

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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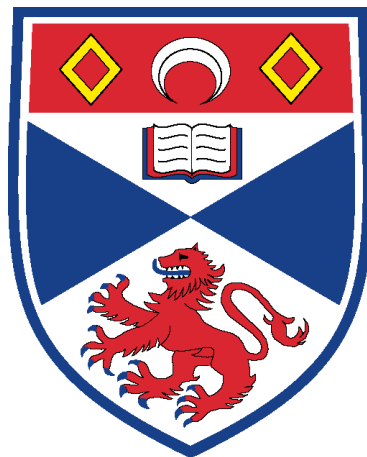
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The Expression of Identity in Equatorial Guinean Narratives (1994 - 2007)

Naomi McLeod



A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
School of Modern Languages

University of St Andrews

April 2012

DECLARATIONS

I, Naomi McLeod, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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ABSTRACT

Equatorial Guinea is the only former Spanish colony in Africa south of the Sahara. Consequently, the Spanish-language literature produced by its authors has been resistant to classification in both the fields of Hispanic and African literary studies. This thesis examines a selection of contemporary narratives written between 1994 and 2007 by the following authors: José Fernando Siale Djangany, Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel and Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng. My main objective in this dissertation is to identify, explain and relate the ways in which post-independence authors express identity in their respective texts. In order to accomplish this task, this thesis posits situational interactions as the key sites for identity expression. Developed from the tenets of symbolic interactionism, the syncretic theoretical model of identity views it as *telescopic*. It is expected that, through the examination of the chosen texts, a contribution can be made to the understanding of the way in which each author expresses identity and can therefore feed into the larger discussion of identity in Equatorial Guinean narrative.

Keywords

Equatorial Guinea literature identity symbolic interactionism José Fernando Siale Djangany Maximiliano Nkogo Esono Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is centred on contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature written in Spanish, a relatively unexplored subject, even in the field of Hispanic literary studies. More specifically, it examines a selection of narrative works – novels and short stories – by contemporary Equatorial Guinean writers with the objective of identifying and explaining how each one of them broaches the issue of identity and sets about representing it in his work. The thesis is less concerned with *which* identities are expressed than with *how* the general subject of identity, as defined in Chapter Two, is handled. The underlying and unifying argument advanced throughout the thesis is that what is termed “situational interaction” – between characters that appear in the texts as well as between reader and text – forms the basis for the expression of identity. Through a systematic examination of the situational interactions presented in the chosen primary texts, it will be argued that each writer frames the expression of identity in a slightly different way. While the emphasis will remain squarely on the representation of identity, related issues such as gender, language, orature and ethnicity will occasionally be signalled where appropriate in the discussion of particular texts.

The choice of the writers and texts included in this thesis requires some commentary. Above all, my aim has been, on the one hand, to focus on a homogeneous group of writers who exhibit certain common features and, on the other, to provide a coherent critical perspective on them. In order to do this, one particular type of writing – narrative prose – has been privileged since it makes use of a broad range of situational interactions in which the key issue of identity expression can be most effectively illuminated. This is not to say that relevant questions of identity are not raised in the work of contemporary Equatorial Guinean poets, such as César Mba Abogo, author of *El portador de Marlow: canción negra sin color* (2007) and *Malabo Blues: La ciudad remordida* (forthcoming). Rather, the strategy has simply been to maintain a systematic generic focus throughout. As far as the writers are concerned, the ones I have chosen were all born and raised in Equatorial Guinea, though some left the country for a period of time in order to attend university. Currently, all but one resides there. The exception is Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, who lives abroad. However, since his social and cultural outlook was determined by his upbringing inside the country and since the two novels he has written were both published by the Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano and touch upon key aspects of identity expression, he can be

legitimately accommodated in this study.¹ The full list of writers studied in this thesis is, in the order in which they appear: José Fernando Siale Djangany, Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel and Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng.

The fact that they all emerged from the same socio-cultural and political context, at a particular time in the country's history, provides another important justification for grouping together the writers included in this thesis. Indeed it is notable in this sense that in his recent critical monograph, *Autores guineanos y expresión literaria* (2010), Djangany describes these writers as *neo-independistas*.² This label signals their historical distinctiveness, a feature that is reflected in certain common interests and concerns. By stressing their shared experience of the years following independence, Djangany sets them apart from their literary predecessors who were shaped either by the experience of colonialism or by the brutal dictatorship of Macías. This difference is important since it draws attention the role they assigned themselves during what José Ramón Trujillo has labelled "los años de la esperanza" (2001: 528). The fact that Djangany stresses *post-independence* rather than *post-colonial* is crucial and this lies at the heart of the theoretical approach developed in Chapter Two.

Since all the authors included in this thesis are still alive and continue to publish new works, it has been necessary to choose a cut-off date. For purely practical reasons – to keep the corpus of primary texts as manageable and coherent as possible – the year 2007 has been chosen. This means that certain novels published after that date, such as *Avión de ricos, ladrón de cerdos* (2008) and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009), by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, *Ecos de Malabo* (2009), by Maximiliano Nkogo Esono and *En el lapso de una ternura* (2011), by José Fernando Siale Djangany, while undoubtedly relevant for an understanding of the main issues examined in this thesis, have not been included. I mention them here as fruitful primary material for future research in this area.

¹ On the other hand, I have excluded Guillermina Mekuy, author of three notable novels: *El llanto de la perra* (2005), *Las tres vírgenes de Santo Tomás* (2008) and *Tres almas para un corazón* (2011). The problem she poses is that although she was born in Equatorial Guinea (and currently lives there), she was raised in Spain. This means that the issues she dwells on in her work do not correspond to those which are foregrounded in this thesis. However, I readily acknowledge that her work – together with that of María Nsué, who began publishing in 1985 – would provide valuable material for a different type of study centred on the female writer's perspective on the realities of Equatorial Guinea.

² 'La independencia con relación al pasado y en su compromiso con el futuro no les decía absolutamente gran cosa. En algo eran Neo-independistas. Vivieron poco o nada de los actos coloniales, pero tuvieron conocimiento como testigos privilegiados desde su infancia o su adolescencia, de los concursos post-independistas' (2010: 79-80).

Given the fact, as mentioned above, that Equatorial Guinea – and especially its literature – is relatively unexplored territory, this thesis has not presumed that the reader is entirely familiar with the subject. This explains, in part at least, how it has been organised. The opening chapter serves to situate the chosen primary texts in a broader context, offering background information on the country's political and social history. This is followed by a summary of the development of Equatorial Guinean prose since 1953, signalling the main characteristics of each group of writers as they emerged and the ways in which they were shaped by the changing circumstances within the country. This discussion helps to locate the writers studied in this thesis in the appropriate socio-cultural framework, underlining their distinctiveness as pointed out by Djangany. Chapter Two then dwells on different theoretical approaches to identity studies and considers how they might be applied to the corpus of primary texts under review. This chapter also explains what is understood by the terms “situational interaction” and “telescopic identity”, both of which are used throughout this thesis. Subsequent chapters – Three, Four, Five and Six – then focus squarely on the issue of how the selected writers broach the issue of the expression of identity in their respective texts. While these discussions are grounded in the specific approach to identity studies outlined in Chapter Two, they also make use of complementary theoretical material when this has been judged to be useful in illuminating the underlying issues at stake. Primary texts are sometimes quoted extensively for the simple reason that because of small print-runs and limited distribution (and hence reception), the reader may not have had easy access to them.³ Finally, the Conclusion reviews the essential findings of the discussion and signals potentially fertile areas of future research.

It will be clear from the above that even within the chronological parameters indicated in the title, this thesis offers a broad, panoramic critical perspective, using the issue of the expression of identity as a means to bring together a fairly wide range of contemporary writers and texts. One of the consequences, readily acknowledged here, is that on occasion the breadth of the discussion has had priority over the depth of analysis. On this point it is only fair to say that this is the first time these texts – many of which have been difficult to acquire – have been assembled in this way as the subject of an academic thesis. In this sense it is hoped that the time and energy invested

³ The issue of readership is discussed in the second half of Chapter One.

in locating and presenting them will be of value to any reader interested in the subject or working in this general area.

The following is a brief summary of the discussions developed in each chapter.

Chapter One

This first chapter provides an introduction to the socio-political history of Equatorial Guinea. It signals areas of geographic, historical, social, political, cultural and economic significance in order to situate this small country in both its African and its wider global context. The second half of Chapter One provides an overview of Equatorial Guinean literature. The information in this chapter provides the reader with relevant details concerning the country and its literary development which have laid the foundations for the chosen authors' treatment of identity in their respective novels.

Chapter Two

The second chapter examines theories of identity expression and primarily adopts a social theorists' framework of symbolic interactionism. This model is explained and critically evaluated while highlighting its relationship to postcolonial studies. A synthesis of theoretical arguments surrounding identity is presented and the specific issues of *agency* and *self* are discussed. I define the parameters within which the literary analysis is undertaken and justify the focus on situational interactions. Finally, the telescopic understanding of identity is explained and the limitations and benefits of the theoretical model adopted in this dissertation are considered.

Chapter Three

The third chapter addresses the narrative works of José Fernando Siale Djangany and has, as its main objective, an investigation of how Djangany addresses the issue of identity in the novels, *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* (2000) and *Autorretrato con un infiel* (2007), as well as in the collection of short stories, *La revuelta de los disfraces* (2003). His approach to fiction differs substantially from the other authors studied in that he

does not seek to represent the status quo realistically.⁴ The theoretical approach applied to the work of this writer reveals the enigmatic nature of a narrative which demands the reader's active engagement. His process of encoding information and in particular his use of anachrony, creates an elusive space in which the reader is forced to infer chronology and meaning. Within the parameters of situational interactions, Djangany expresses identity both in the form of interaction between characters and, crucially, between reader and text. The presence of a fantastic dimension in his writing also causes the reader to question the relationship between reality and fiction. His approach to identity expression becomes synonymous with the search for meaning and is presented in his texts as multilayered, anachronistic and paradoxical.

Chapter Four

The fourth chapter examines the collection of short stories *Adja-Adja y otros relatos* (1994, 2000) and the novel *Nambula* (2006), by Maximiliano Nkogo Esono. His attention to local detail and his representation of daily life in Equatorial Guinea has inspired the designation of 'nuevo costumbrismo nacional'.⁵ He shares this feature with Juan Tomas Ávila Laurel who represents daily life in a similar way. Although the theoretical consideration of situational interactions is still at the core of the analysis, an additional model of power relations is adopted in order to further explore how the issue of identity is handled in these texts. Nkogo Esono's particular vision of identity is negotiated in relation to power and, more specifically, how power is utilised in order to benefit an individual in a particular situation. It is argued that power constructs influence situational interactions and a systematic examination of these interactions reveals that facets of identity are fully exploited by characters in order to survive. Nkogo Esono also strongly criticises the ways in which power relations are manipulated for personal benefit.

⁴ It is noteworthy that this author has received the least amount of scholarly attention. For example, his latest novel, *Autorretrato con un infiel* (2007), appears only briefly in Gloria Nistal Rosique's article. For this reason, the chapter is longer than the others.

⁵ This term is employed by Anacleto Oló Mibuy in the prologue to the 1994 collection of *Adja-Adja y otros relatos* and subsequently by Gloria Nistal Rosique (2008: 122).

Chapter Five

The fifth chapter focuses on Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's novels, *El desmayo de Judas* (2001), *Rusia se va a Asamse* (2002) and *Nadie tiene buena fama en este país* (2002), as well as the collection of short stories, *Cuentos crudos* (2007). Of the authors included in this dissertation, his work is the most diverse in terms of characters and settings. I argue that the heterogenic quality of his narratives typifies his expression of identity and constitutes a reaction to the homogenising discourse proposed by the ruling élite within the country.⁶ His novels touch on issues related to interpretations of history, perspective, re-centring of the female protagonist, globalisation and the individual's relationship with the collective. The eclectic nature of his writing reflects the author's expression of identity as variable, multifaceted and resistant to classification.

Chapter Six

The final chapter is devoted to the novels, *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) and *Huellas bajo tierra* (1998), by Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng for which a theoretical understanding of the postcolonial issue of hybridity is helpful. The situational interactions in his texts reveal different examples of the hybrid which touch on issues of religion, the cultural inheritance of colonialism and religious education. I also dwell on the relationship between the individual and the collective, as the characters as well as local spaces presented by Bacheng can be extended to represent the larger population or an entire region. This technique will be contrasted with Ávila Laurel, who presents a more individual conception of identity. The binary oppositions in Bacheng's texts express the inherent tension that exists in his portrayal of the contemporary Equatorial Guinean subject, so that the juxtaposition of designations such as "African" and "European" are employed to highlight hybridity. The vivid description of local settings makes his narrative comparable, in some ways, to that of Nkogo Esono.

⁶ Cusack explains: 'Although there are no common pre-modern roots which would encompass all the ethnic groups of Equatorial Guinea, the ruling élite have attempted to construct a myth of origin on a common Bantu ancestry' (1999b: 229).

Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis provides a review of the essential findings of the analyses and more importantly, it details areas for future research and dwells on the implications of the specific theoretical focus chosen for this dissertation, its benefits as well as its limitations. Finally, it supports the collective efforts of the *neo-independentistas* in securing a future of Equatorial Guinean letters by actively engaging in the promotion of their work.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND: PUTTING EQUATORIAL GUINEA ON THE MAP

Hispanic Studies are invariably associated geographically with Europe or Latin America, while Africa has rarely been understood in this way. It has not been until recently that African authors, writing in Spanish, have garnered recognition as active members in the field of Hispanic Studies. Equatorial Guinea is the only former Spanish colony in Africa south of the Sahara, which places it in a unique cultural position. The distinctiveness of this small Republic is such that scholars approach it with both curiosity and apprehension because of its relative under-representation in academic research.⁷ It should be noted that writers from Cameroon and Morocco also use Spanish as a vehicle of literary expression. This overview aims to highlight elements of geographic, historical, social, political, cultural and economic significance, in order to help the reader to situate Equatorial Guinea both within its African and global context. Subsequently, a brief literary history will follow which will focus strictly on narrative production and culminate in the contemporary period.

Geography

Equatorial Guinea is a small country that covers an area of 28,051 square kilometres, distributed over a series of islands in the Gulf of Guinea and over territory on mainland Africa.⁸ The latter, or Río Muni as it is called, is located between the countries of Gabon and Cameroon on the west coast of Africa and covers an area of approximately 26,000 square kilometres. In addition to the mainland territory, the country comprises five islands, as well as various tiny landmasses surrounding them. The largest island is currently known as Bioko and measures approximately 2,017 square kilometres. It is laterally aligned with Cameroon and houses the country's capital Malabo, formerly known as Santa Isabel. The island has undergone several name changes since the arrival of the Portuguese, including Fernando Poo. During the first Equatorial Guinean dictatorship, it carried the name of Francisco Macías Nguema. The island of Annobón is the second largest; it measures only seventeen square kilometres and is located to the

⁷ Alicia Campos suggests that lack of critical attention given to Equatorial Guinea could be a result of the small size of the country and the absence of violent conflict (2003b: 96).

⁸ This is approximately the size of Sicily. Of the main sources on the geography of Equatorial Guinea, see in particular: Max Liniger-Goumaz (1988: ix), Colectivo Helio (1997: 17-19) and Rene Pélissier (1964: 40).

south-west of the mainland. Corisco, Elobey Grande and Elobey Chico are situated in close proximity to the coast of Gabon and collectively consist of seventeen square kilometres.

‘Discovery’ of Territory

In 1472, twenty years before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas, Portuguese explorers Fernão do Poo and Lopes Gonçalves set foot on the territory currently known as the island of Bioko. A year earlier, in 1471, two different explorers, João de Santarem and Pedro de Escobar, had already reached the island now known as Annobón. These territories held advantageous positions during the slave trade and became gathering points for inhabitants who were then transported to the New World.⁹

In 1777, Portugal traded their land in the Gulf of Guinea with Spain in exchange for territories in Brazil (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 20-21). Regardless of Spain’s ‘ownership’ of the territory, and primarily due to its strategic geographical location, in 1827 the British installed a base as part of their anti-slavery campaign in Santa Isabel (today Malabo). The British attempted to buy the island for £60,000, but the transaction was never finalised (Cusack, 1999c: 68). They remained on the island until 1845 and, although the British presence was never officially acknowledged, it left an enduring mark on the overall culture of the island (Pélisser, 1965: 43; Lipski, 2002: 76). Evidence of Britain’s occupation in Equatorial Guinea is recognised in its adoption of certain names, for example: Port Clarence (Malabo). Also, the linguistic influence of English is evident in *pichinglis*, one of the languages commonly spoken in the country. Shortly after the British relinquished control of the island, Spain initiated its official presence with its first Spanish Governor in 1858 (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 13). Many European countries had interests in African territories during the ‘scramble for Africa’ at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period, borders were unstable and permeable which made countries vulnerable to imperial occupation.¹⁰

⁹ For a complete history see Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (1977).

¹⁰ Thomas Pakenham explains that the term ‘scramble for Africa’ was coined in 1884. This date coincides with the Berlin Conference which further formalised Europe’s involvement the African continent. There is still much debate surrounding the exact time period it refers to. However, Pakenham states that it encompasses the historical period from 1876 to 1912 (1991: xxvii).

The current geographical boundaries of the country have undergone many changes since their arbitrary creation in the nineteenth century.¹¹ Prior to 1885, Spain controlled a substantially larger amount of land. However, after the Congress of Berlin in 1885 and the Treaty of Paris in 1900, Spain's territories were considerably reduced. The result brought about the boundaries that currently delineate the territory of Equatorial Guinea.¹² The negotiation and revocation of land emphasises the artificiality of borders typical of the colonisation of Africa. This process of drawing and re-drawing its official limits reflects the complexity surrounding the origins, and subsequent political and historical development of Equatorial Guinea and, consequently, the sense of national identity of its inhabitants.

Population

In 2007, the country's population was estimated to be 551,201 (C.I.A., 2008: 199).¹³ It is a highly diverse population consisting of many ethnic groups, each possessing its own traditions, values and languages. The main ethnic groups that will be discussed here are: Fang, Bubi, Ndongé, Bisio, Annobones and the sub-group on the island of Bioko known as Fernandino. The specific tribal distribution throughout the territory is discussed in further detail below. At this point, it will be helpful to describe the specific characteristics of each group.

Fang

The Fang are native to the mainland territory of Río Muni, although some have moved over to the island of Bioko (Lipski, 2002: 70). The delineation of borders heavily

¹¹ 'Guinea Ecuatorial es el típico ejemplo del estado poscolonial africano caracterizado por la unión de áreas territoriales dispares según el capricho de los distintos colonizadores europeos en el siglo XIX'. (Cusack, 2004a: 157).

¹² 'Pero las potencias europeas, Gran Bretaña, Alemania y Francia, aprovechando la debilidad política y militar de una España que intentaba superar el trauma del 98, fueron royendo el otrora amplio territorio subsahariano de España. Primero, el Congreso de Berlín de 1885, despojó España de más de 500.000 km2 de territorio. Luego, el tratado de París de 1900 entre Francia y España, cerró el ciclo de desmantelamiento de los territorios españoles del Golfo de Guinea al dejarlos en poco más de 28,000 km2. En 1904, España ocupó el Río Muni' (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom, 2000: 14).

¹³ The World Trade Organisation estimated the population in 2006 to be 515,000. However, it explains that it is difficult to acquire accurate facts from the country (Colectivo Helio, 1997: 63). Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, a prolific writer and resident of Malabo, suggests that the population is closer to 600,000 (2006: 29). Based on a housing census conducted in 1994, the UN claims the population to be 494,271. This can be compared to the census of 1983 where: Fang 81.5%, Bubi 9.6%, Ndongé 4%, Annobones 1.5% , Bisios 1.5% (Ávila Laurel, 2006: 48).

affected the mainland territory of Río Muni, as the majority of its residents are Fang, as Justo Bolekia Boleká explains:

La etnia Fang que ocupaba unos ciento ochenta mil kilómetros cuadrados se vio esparcida en cuatro espacios políticos: Camerún, Congo, Gabón y Guinea Ecuatorial. Era una estrategia eficaz para debilitar a dicha etnia y evitar la creación de un Estado monoétnico en el continente africano dominado íntegramente por las potencias militares europeas. (2003: 152)

Within the limits of Equatorial Guinea, the Fang identify themselves as members of a larger community which stretches beyond the political borders and represents 85.74 percent of the population (UN, 2003: 2). Justo Bolekia Boleká explains that they follow a patriarchal system of social organisation (2003: 25). The family, which is held in the highest regard, usually has one heroic male ancestor as a focal point for organisation. Society is organised according to tribe, clan, lineage and family, with a strong sense of community. They are an active agricultural community and are avid hunters. The Fang have two particular religious practices. The first involves the use of amulets and other symbolic objects to ward off evil spirits, and the second is the recognition of *nsamá* as a supreme being. Both of these practices reflect the group's wish to honour its ancestors, respect its elders and maintain its traditional customs and values (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 26). The Fang are a polygamous society which focuses on the rearing of sons in order to continue the family lineage (Colectivo Helio, 1997: 52). This is not only the largest ethnic group in Equatorial Guinea but also extends into regions of both Gabon and Cameroon. Early fragmentation of this ethnic group, with the delineation of political borders, resulted in the Fang becoming the largest group of inhabitants in the country, a fact that violently resurfaced in the political arena during the post-independence period.

Due to the large population of Fang on the mainland, their vernacular language is widely spoken. In addition, those emigrating from neighbouring countries, as well as inhabitants from the islands, communicate on the mainland in Fang.¹⁴

Ndowè/Combe

The Ndowè occupy the islands of Corisco, Elobey Grande and Elobey Chico, located between the island of Annobón and the mainland, as well as part of the coast of Río Muni. This ethnic group represents 3.55 percent of the population. The Ndowè are also

¹⁴ See also *Curso de lengua fang* (Bibang Oyee, Julián-B. 1990).

known as *playeros* due to their geographic distribution. They have a strong sense of solidarity based on shared beliefs and origin. Unlike the Fang, they are organised in smaller units which are independent from each other and there is no single ruler of the population (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 28). There are several subgroups of the Ndowè, one of which is the Combe. The Combe observe a monotheistic religion and their economy is reliant on the sea (Colectivo Helio, 1997: 54). They have chiefs who are guided by a council of family elders. The Ndowè maintain a vernacular language which is part of the Bantu family.

Bisois/Bujeba

This group shares the coast of Rio Muni with the Ndowè and the Fang. The Bisois represent 1.14 percent of the population and are similar to the Ndowè. Occasionally referred to as *semiplayeros*, they maintain their own vernacular language. Both *playeros* and *semiplayeros* are associated with the sea and they depend on fishing and other similar activities for their livelihood. The vernacular language of this group is also related to the Bantu family.

Annobonés

The Annobonese reside almost exclusively on the island of Annobón, which is the only area of Equatorial Guinea that is in the southern hemisphere. Annobón is considerably more geographically isolated than Bioko, given that it is situated farther away from the mainland. It features a mixed population made up in part by descendants of those captured for the slave trade that remained there.¹⁵ Some other residents originate from the attempts made by the Portuguese to repopulate the island during the sixteenth century. The Annobonese represent 1.64 percent of the population. They rely on fishing and they also cultivate cotton (de Castro and Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1998: 6). They maintain their own language, although they also speak Spanish: ‘On Annobón Island, despite its nearly total isolation from the remainder of the country [...] nearly all residents speak Spanish quite well [they also speak fa d’ambú]’ (Lipski, 2002: 71). Due to their remote location, the inhabitants of this island are less likely to have been exposed to other vernacular languages than, for example, the residents of the more central island of Bioko.

¹⁵ ‘Las islas de Annobón, Corisco, Santo Tomé y Príncipe se convirtieron en gigantescos almacenes de negros que esperaban su deportación a las Américas’ (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 16-17).

Bubi

The Bubi live as a concentrated group which resides almost exclusively on the island of Bioko, and does not extend onto the mainland. They represent 6.46 percent of the total population. The Bubi observe matrilineal customs which are influential at key moments in a family member's life. For example, two significant events in a boy's life, baptism and marriage, are entrusted to his maternal uncle (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 32). Traditionally, the Bubi are a population that sustains itself by hunting and agriculture. As a matrilineal society, they do not partake in polygamy. They believe in protective spirits, especially ancestors. This kind of protection is extended to the island as a whole through two spirits, Chiba and Bisila (Colectivo Helio, 1997: 50).

Specific to the island of Bioko is a population known as Fernandinos who were heavily influenced by the British presence (1827-1845). They are 'descendents of pidgin English-speaking freed slaves from Sierra Leone and Liberia, who arrived in Fernando Poo in the nineteenth century' (Lipski, 2002: 70). Bolekia Boleká explains that there were also freed slaves from the United States as well as from Cuba, and that they had more rights than the indigenous population (2003: 66). He adds:

[S]e convertirían más tarde en la burguesía negra adinerada del primer cuarto del siglo XX, que si bien era en su mayoría protestante, y estaba *britanizada*, había adoptado la cultura española, al aprovecharse de las ventajas que ésta le ofrecía, tal como la concesión de tierras tanto en la ciudad de Santa Isabel como en otros lugares, tener el monopolio del comercio del aceite de palma que producían los Bubis, obtener grandes beneficios en la explotación de cacao, café y otros productos, etc. (2003: 66).

Between 1900 and 1959, the Fernandinos acted as intermediaries between the colonizers and the indigenous population (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 86).

Language

The cultural and ethnic diversity of Equatorial Guinea is mirrored in the variety of languages which, apart from Spanish, are spoken by the population. All of the ethnic groups described above maintain a vernacular language as well as encourage proficiency in Spanish. Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel specifies the use of various languages in the country:

Los individuos de una misma etnia hablan entre sí en su lengua, salvo raras ocasiones, como entre desconocidos o en ambientes escolares. Con las gentes de las demás etnias

y con los extranjeros se habla el español [...]. Entre guineanos, esta última lengua [*pichinglis*] se habla en individuos que tienen cierta complicidad, como amistades de hace mucho o entre amigos íntimos. (2006: 35)

The use of Spanish in the country is the key to understanding the coexistence of such diverse groups. With the exception of *pichinglis* on the island of Bioko, Spanish serves as the linguistic common denominator for the various ethnic groups. Until relatively recently, Spanish was the only official language in Equatorial Guinea. French was introduced as the second official language in 1998, partly due to the influence from the neighbouring countries of Cameroon and Gabon. However, it could also be a result of trade with other French-speaking African countries, as well as the return of inhabitants who have lived abroad. The complex linguistic situation found in Equatorial Guinea has been studied by scholars such as John Lipski, Celia Casado-Fresnillo, Manuel Castillo Barril, Germán de Granda and Antonio Quilis. The amalgamated territories and respective ethnic groups provide a suitable space for language interaction. Due to the variety of languages in Equatorial Guinea, it is not surprising that inter-tribal communication takes place using the national language. John Lipski explains:

In comparison with most other West and Central African nations, Equatorial Guinea contains a high proportion of proficient speakers of the metropolitan language [...]. The choice of Spanish as a national language is both a reflection of close cultural ties with the metropolis, and of the realistically high level of proficiency in Spanish. (2002: 71-73)

Generally, Creole languages develop when two or more languages are in contact and there is no other means of communication (Lipski, 2002: 74). Since Equatorial Guineans employ Spanish to communicate, there has been no need for Creole languages to develop. The Spanish spoken in Equatorial Guinea ‘has no systematic differences from Peninsular Spanish, but is rather characterized by a considerable instability with regard to verb conjugation, syntactic formation, prepositional usage, sequence of tenses, etc.’ (Lipski, 2002: 76). Despite this grammatical ‘instability’, the language has remained essentially constant with little or no influence from native languages.

The other language that bridges the communication gap between ethnic groups is *pichinglis*. At this point, it is important to note that *pichinglis* first arrived on the Island of Bioko with the immigration of Nigerian workers during the colonial period,

and has remained an integral component of communication on the island.¹⁶ Lipski clarifies the usage of *pichinglis* on the island:

PE [pidgin English] has the advantage of being an ethnically neutral lingua franca, which can be freely spoken without yielding to a rival ethnic group. At the same time, PE is more closely associated with popular levels, while Spanish, although widely spoken and with considerable fluency, is still identified with 'Europeans'. (2002: 79)

In addition, *pichinglis* has less obvious links to colonialism than other European languages. Lipski also observes that some *playeros* and Bubis have learned to speak Fang due to the influence of the national government (2002: 70-71). For these reasons, it cannot be stated with certainty that Equatorial Guineans communicate in any one given language. Lipski affirms that 'their linguistic production is marked by a high degree of code switching and introduction of words from other languages' (2002: 72). This approach to language is not unexpected given the extent of Equatorial Guinea's multi-ethnicity.

Colonisation

Unlike other African countries (or Latin America), colonisation of Equatorial Guinea did not begin immediately following Spain's official 'possession' of the territory. The Spanish arrived to explore the island of Fernando Poo in 1831, appointed the first Spanish Governor in 1858, but did not occupy the area until 1904, the year of the initiation of their formal imperial project of colonisation (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 27). This delay is significant as it suggests that Spain's interest in Equatorial Guinea remained dormant until after the loss of her other colonies. There was no discrimination between the diverse native ethnic groups. In fact, the main objective was to create (or re-create) Africans in the Spanish image. Once achieved, Equatorial Guineans would work towards securing means of production that would financially benefit Spain (Fra Molinero, 2004: 122).

¹⁶ Alicia Campos relates the large influx of Nigerian workers, who entered the country in order to alleviate the labour demands created by the plantations, to the initial weakness of Equatorial Guinea nationalism (2003b:101). 'Pidgin English is not widely used in Rio Muni, except in Bata, due to the influx of residents of Fernando Poo and of natives of Cameroon, Nigeria and other English-speaking areas' (Lipski, 2002: 70).

The main objectives of Spain's colonisation are twofold: first, the 'civilising' project which revolved around the imposition of the Spanish language and culture; and secondly, the economic exploitation of the land. During the colonial period, the territory was called Spanish Guinea and was seen as Spain's only remaining 'tropical' colony. The Spanish promoted cultivation of cacao, predominantly on the island of Bioko, and the collection of timber on the mainland.

Hispanicisation

The most significant and enduring legacy of colonisation in Equatorial Guinea is the Hispanic culture. Colonisation, viewed as a political, religious, economic and educational action, was the principal instrument through which Spanish 'civilisation' was transmitted (Ocha'a Mve Bengobesama, 1985: 78). Constantino Ocha'a Mve Bengobesama argues that Spanish religious education repressed native cultural elements which were incompatible with 'civilisation' (1985: 157). Education was one of the most effective tools that the colonisers employed to disseminate their beliefs and culture, primarily to children. The colonial period gave rise to the creation of an Afro-Hispanic culture. Igor Cusack remarks:

La cultura afro-hispánica en África es un hecho aislado. Durante el periodo de intensa hispanización (de 1936-1968) de su colonia ecuatorial, España era un país aislado dentro de Europa. Y fue esa España, esa España derechista, falangista-militarista y católica la que tuvo el mayor impacto en la colonia. (2004b: 166)

The intense effort to Hispanicise the population, coupled with the small size of the country, partially explains how the Spanish language and culture took root in Equatorial Guinea. Latin America also shares the experience of Spain's 'civilising' agenda. However, it was a different process due to Spain's motivations and the historical context at the time of colonisation. Colonisation by Spain has left similar cultural imprints on both continents.¹⁷ However, the degree to which they are sustained is

¹⁷ Elisa Rizo draws attention to the possibility that the study of Equatorial Guinean literature can open more opportunities for a better understanding of Spanish-language literature in general and Hispano-America in particular. She explains: 'En lo que toca al avance de su difusión, para los hispanoparlantes del mundo y, especialmente, para los hispanoamericanos, la literatura de Guinea promete una oportunidad para expandir y reevaluar el conocimiento de nuestra propia experiencia poscolonial de la hispanidad' (2005: 178).

dependent upon the individual populations.¹⁸ Donato Ndong-Bidyogo describes the Hispanic inheritance in the following way:

La Hispanidad de ahora mismo no es una propuesta de vuelta a las brumas de nuestra niñez, tiempo en que fuimos los apéndices de aquel «imperio» otoñal de selvas tropicales y montañas nevadas. La Hispanidad de ahora mismo es un engranaje a través de la lengua, de la cultura y de ciertos valores humanísticos, sin que ninguno pueda sentirse desamparado por orfandad. (1986: 3)

Through the assimilation of Spanish culture, Hispanic elements have been adopted by the inhabitants of the country, and have consequently become a defining feature of identity. More important still, he expresses a prominent sense of belonging and unity.¹⁹ Presently, the Hispanic cultural element distinguishes Equatorial Guinea from the surrounding areas. Ndong-Bidyogo maintains, in his prologue to *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial*: '[e]l pueblo guineano ha definido y asumido su identidad hispano-bantú, que nos distingue de nuestros vecinos franco-bantúes y luso-bantúes' (2000: 55). As this quotation suggests, the fusion of African and Spanish cultures has given rise to an identity which can be shared by various ethnic groups and can, in turn, be employed to differentiate themselves from neighbouring peoples.

Patronato de indígenas

In the year 1904, the administrative body *Patronato de indígenas* was created ostensibly to protect the indigenous population while strengthening cultural subservience to Spain (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 38).²⁰ By means of this arm of the colonial administration, the indigenous population was divided into categories: 'emancipado pleno', 'emancipado parcial', and 'no emancipado' (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom, 2000: 15). This type of classification was designed to subvert established social

¹⁸ Ocha'a Mve Bengobesama suggests that 'Hispanidad' has a socio historical genesis that is shared by those who have been colonised (1985: 67). Of course, the term 'Hispanidad' is not without its problems. In this instance, *Hispanidad* is understood as 'a term popularized after 1931, is the particular type of *Hispanismo* advocated by the Falange Española. The ideology of *Hispanidad* differs radically from that of *Hispanismo*, which was largely a liberal movement based on the principles of the Enlightenment' (Diffie, 1943: 457). An advocate of Spanish religious and intellectual unity under fascism, Ramiro de Maeztu wrote *Defensa de la hispanidad* in 1934. This interpretation of *Hispanidad* will be examined in Chapter Three in the epigraph of Djangany's novel *Autorretrato con un infiel* (2007). See also 'Guinea Ecuatorial: al filo de la hispanidad' (Guillermo Pié Jahn, 2009: 139-154).

¹⁹ This is a feature of *Hispanidad* that could be extended to include Latin America and other former Spanish colonies as an area of future research.

²⁰ The *Patronato de indígenas* underwent several stages of development and functioned until 1958 (de Castro and Ndong, 1998: 116).

interactions and to enable the enforcement of social control. In other words, these categories were applicable to all ethnic groups and thus replaced, in the eyes of the colonisers, any hierarchy previously established between them.

The indigenous inhabitant who had been categorised as ‘emancipado pleno’ (including members of his immediate family) was awarded similar legal rights to those of the Spanish people, except in certain cases which were regulated by colonial legislation (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 57). These rights were conditional and did not supersede the inherent binary opposition of the coloniser over the colonised. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo describes in detail the corresponding stipulations:

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. (1977: 57)

The ‘carta de emancipación plena’ was a privileged possession that allowed the ‘freedom’ to buy items such as olive oil and/or bread, and permitted the consumption of alcoholic beverages in public (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 57). Partial emancipation proscribed the consumption of alcohol, allowed loans of up to 10,000 pesetas without permission from the administrative body, and granted the right to participate in legal proceedings as witnesses (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 56-57).

Conversely, the non-emancipated had few privileges, and were typically subjected to forced labour. Moreover, they did not have the right to own property, and were controlled by restrictive laws concerning personal assets. In contrast to the partially emancipated, they were not permitted to appear in a Court of Justice (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 58). During the colonial period (1858-1968), these classifications were inextricably linked to positions of power and privilege.

Decolonisation

The process of the decolonisation of Equatorial Guinea first began with Spain’s admission to the United Nations in 1955, which was contingent upon disclosure of information relating to its African colony (Campos, 2003b: 97). Not prepared to relinquish control of the territory, Spain sought inspiration from Portugal which had

employed a similar tactic. Campos explains: “Portugal had denied the existence of colonial populations under its sovereignty, claiming that the African territories were part of the national territory and, therefore, covered by the international principle of non-intervention” (2003b: 97). By changing the status of Equatorial Guinea from a colony to a province, Spain satisfied the demands of the UN while still maintaining control over its territory. In 1956, the status of ‘province’ was granted to Fernando Poo and Río Muni, along with all of the laws and privileges that accompany such a designation.²¹

This shift in title and status from colony to province produced an undesired effect for the Spanish government (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 83). Instead of maintaining control over its territory, the degree of autonomy which accompanies the status of province was interpreted by the Equatorial Guinean people as a step closer to independence. Alicia Campos describes the emergence of a double discourse among those who demanded independence, a discourse in which one side claimed the ‘illegality’ of colonialism, while the other perceived independence as the ‘culmination of the civilizing project of the Spaniards’ (Campos, 2003b: 102). Spain tried to rectify this political division by reluctantly granting autonomy to the provinces. Justo Bolekia Boleká explains:

Desde la entrada en vigor del régimen autonómico el primero de enero de 1964, se disponía de cuatro años para que el país de [sic] independizara. En caso contrario, si los futuros Guineoecautorianos [capital in original] no solicitaban formalmente su independencia, la autonomía pasaría a ser renovada por otros cuatro años. (2003: 98)

Although autonomy brought Equatorial Guinea closer to independence, there were still bureaucratic hurdles to overcome. As the above quote indicates, if independence was not formally requested by the Equatorial Guineans within four years, the designation as an autonomous Spanish state would automatically be renewed. Spain was committed to maintaining control over its former colony, but there was also uncertainty surrounding the ability and preparedness of Equatorial Guinea to actively seek independence. Spain was also attempting to exploit the political division forming within the country, between those who wished to remain under the colonial ‘wing’ and those who wanted complete independence. Spain sought to satisfy the ‘élite’ social strata so that they

²¹ For a complete discussion of the process of ‘provincialización’ see Campos (2003b: 98), Ndongo-Bidyogo (1977: 75) and Bolekia Boleká (2003: 89).

would not push for complete independence, in the hope that they would overwhelm the independence seekers.

Indeed, autonomy did not last, and by 1966, '[i]t was clear that, by that time, the Regime of Autonomy was not satisfying any social or political group' (Campos, 2003b: 105). There were many complications which arose before and during the transfer of power from Spain to Equatorial Guinea, including a reluctance to establish firm dates and also disagreements over proposals. This situation led to the direct involvement of the UN which was to oversee an election. Therefore, 'a mission was promptly appointed to supervise the referendum and the general elections' (Campos, 2003b: 113). There were, at this point in the country's political history, several established political parties seeking control of the future independent state, for example:

MONALIGE [Movimiento Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial]. Created in Gabón (pre-independence), and comprised members of the Bubi. This group in particular aspired to the separation of Fernando Poo from Rio Muni.

IGE [Idea Popular de Guinea Ecuatorial]. Founded by exiles in Cameroon (pre-independence), and comprised members of the Fang ethnic group.

UPLGE [Unión Popular de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial]. Created by Ondó Edú in Libreville (pre-independence), and also comprised members of the Fang ethnic group.

MUNGE [Movimiento de Unión Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial]. Created in 1964 during autonomy, headed by Bonifacio Ondó Edú.

These political bodies represented the ethnic diversity of the region and were each concerned with the future independence of the country. However, not all of the political parties had the same agenda. There was a manifesto set in motion by MONALIGE for Fernando Poo, currently the island of Bioko, to be granted separate independence. This tactic was devised to secure and control the economic wealth that was concentrated on the island.

Bonifacio Ondó Edú and Francisco Macías Nguema were the two candidates confronted by the general elections. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo observes that the period of autonomy was seen as irrational and, during that time, Macías embodied rational hope. He was seen as a person capable of leading the people following independence (1977: 107). It is necessary to point out that, during the elections, there were 'secret struggles' within Spain in support of a candidate who would provide economic benefit to the former colonial power following independence (Liniger-Goumaz, 1988: xii).

Independence

On 3 October 1968, Francisco Macías Nguema was declared President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, and '[o]n being granted independence from Spain on 12 October 1968, it [Equatorial Guinea] became the 126th member of the United Nations' (Liniger-Goumaz, 1988: ix). This newly granted independence was highly celebrated, having occurred later than in neighbouring countries.²² This delay could be attributed both to the reluctance exhibited by Spain and to the unstable political system within the country. Independence was a welcome change from colonialism and autonomy. Unfortunately, the colonial administration was to be replaced by a brutal dictatorship.

Macías

Despite President Macías being elected in a democratic fashion, his elevation to a position of authority was paradoxically the springboard for the destruction of the democracy which had granted him power. It has been suggested that the prevalence of 'personal rule' is greater in societies that are ethnically diverse (Jackson and Rosberg, 1992: 47). As seen previously, the Fang represents a disproportionate part of the country's total multi-ethnic population.²³ This fact, in its own right, was the catalyst for the installation of personal rule in Equatorial Guinea. Jackson and Rosberg explain the characteristics of such a system:

Modern African authoritarianism is characterized by the removal of constitutional rights and protections from political opponents, the elimination of institutional checks and balances, and the centralization and concentration of state power in presidential offices, as well as the termination of open party politics and the regulation and confinement of political participation – usually within the framework of a single party system.²⁴ (1992: 23)

Following an attempted *coup d'état* in the first years of his presidency, Francisco Macías Nguema abolished the Constitution, and by extension, the constitutional rights of his people (Campos, 2003b: 114, Liniger-Goumaz, 1988: ix). In addition, he

²² When compared with the bordering countries of Cameroon and Gabon that both gained independence in 1960.

²³ Igor Cusack suggests: 'La dificultad en establecer una nación en estados multiétnicos puede ser la causa de la proliferación de este tipo de régimen' (2004a: 159).

²⁴ See also Jackson and Rosberg (1992: 41) for a detailed examination of sub-Saharan Africa personal political loyalty.

denounced all forms of political opposition and implemented a single party system, the PUNT [Partido Único de los Trabajadores]. Under the sole leadership of Macías, membership and allegiance were mandatory. The creation of a single party system was ruthlessly enforced by Macías. Two thirds of the members of the elected assembly died, fled or simply disappeared (Fernández, 1976: 185). Max Liniger-Goumaz, a renowned authority on the subject, states that, '[i]n the years that followed, Equatorial Guinea came to be known as an African *gulag* and one great torture camp where people either had to flee into exile or remain in the country as hostages to the regime' (1988: ix-x). Although the figures are not exact, it has been suggested that more than a third of the population fled during Macías' regime.²⁵

Macías sequestered and silenced the country, persecuting and systematically eliminating members of the intellectual community (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 20). His regime has become synonymous with the term *nguemismo*.²⁶ The installation of Macías' regime, directly following the period of colonial rule, produced a revalorisation of Spain's cultural heritage. Baltasar Fra Molinero argues that 'hispanophilia' became a source of nostalgia, and acted as a form of resistance against the totalitarian regime (2000: 120).

Macías' regime was not only exceedingly detrimental to the Equatorial Guinean people, but also to the Spanish citizens who occupied the territory. Unlike the British form of 'indirect rule', Equatorial Guinea was populated in part by settlers during the colonial period. After Independence, most people remained until it became too dangerous to do so. In February 1972, Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared *materia reservada* all information pertaining to the former colony, which meant that those in exile had no means of communication with their homeland, and all public circulation of information on Equatorial Guinea abruptly ceased (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 127).

Macías highlighted the importance of African 'authenticity' in the period immediately following independence in an attempt to counteract the colonial discourse that sought to assimilate and suppress African culture. This political agenda is

²⁵ The difficulty in establishing exact figures is due in part to the secrecy maintained by the ruling power.

²⁶ This is a term first used by Max Liniger-Goumaz and is defined by Mbaré Ngom: "El nguemismo se articulaba y apoyaba esencialmente en tres pilares principales: primero, en una plataforma étnica excluyente cuyo núcleo central era un sector del grupo étnico fang y más concretamente el subgrupo fang-esangui, también conocido como el clan de Mongomo, del distrito de Mongomo, provincia natal de Francisco Macías; segundo, en una guardia nacional cuyos mandos eran fang-esangui en su mayoría, y por último, en un grupo paramilitar llamado las 'Juventudes en marcha con Macías'" (Ngom, 2004: 48).

summarised by the following excerpt from Justo Bolekia Boleká which illustrates the tone of this period in Equatorial Guinean history:

Esta autenticidad fingida sirvió para imponer a la población un integrismo vertical en sentido sociocultural [...]. Todas las instituciones del Estado se centralizaron en la persona del demagogo presidente, a quien se concedió, entre otros, los títulos que se citan a continuación, y que debían ser recitados todos los días por todos, sobre todo los estudiantes:

Único Dios, milagro y salvador del Pueblo guineano
Jefe de Estado y de Gobierno
Inquisidor Mayor del colonialismo
Comandante en jefe de las Fuerzas Armadas
Camarada supremo del PUNT
Padre de la libertad
Líder de acero
Gran maestro de la Orden de la Independencia
Padre de la Revolución
Primer presidente vitalicio constitucional
Líder de la nación y del partido
Gran maestro en la educación y la cultura
Incansable y único milagro
Responsable supremo de la Revolución democrática africana
Gran Mesías. (2003: 135-36)

President Macías has been likened to tyrannical rulers such as Idi Amin of Uganda although, unlike Amin, he ruled continuously for eleven years. During this time, he had the help of his subordinate taskforce, the ‘Juventudes en marcha con Macías’, as well as the support, tacit or otherwise, of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, North Korea, France, Spain and Uganda (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 136). Equatorial Guinea’s export revenue depended on trade with these countries. However, Macías crippled the economy as Equatorial Guinea is paradoxically a primary resource-rich nation which depends on imports in order to survive. Furthermore, he solidified political relationships with those countries’ leaders based on economic dependency.

Obiang

It was not until 3 August 1979 that Macías fell from power, overthrown in a successful coup led by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Known as the *Golpe de la Libertad*, this event is viewed as the beginning of what Justo Bolekia Boleká describes as the ‘obianguemista’ regime (2003: 139). Teodoro Obiang Nguema tried and executed his

uncle, but showed no signs of establishing a new political system. As Max Liniger-Goumaz remarks: '[r]ight from the start of the new regime, it was made quite clear that no political discussion of any kind would be tolerated' (1988: x). As a widespread hope for change was fostered, many of the country's citizens returned following the coup. Nonetheless, the political and economic corruption persisted and the population remained subject to autocratic rule. The two regimes employed similar methods, the only difference being that the latter resulted in fewer deaths (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 140).

The ironically named *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE) became the new political party formed by Obiang in 1987 and was the only political party to be recognised by the President. Justo Bolekia Boleká notes that: '[r]ecordaba perfectamente al PUNT que fundó Macías Nguema en 1970, con la única salvedad de que la afiliación era «voluntaria»' (2003: 142). This single-party system was democracy in name alone, a thinly veiled façade for the more sinister underlying reality: the subjugation of the Equatorial Guinean population by an oppressive autocracy. Both intellectuals and common citizens, who returned after the change in government, were forced back into exile, either because of their disillusionment with the new regime, or because of socio-economic factors. In fact, in 1986, it was estimated that '110,000 of the country's nationals [were] still in exile' (Liniger-Goumaz, 1988: 164). This number is remarkable considering a recently estimated resident population in 2007 of 551,201 (C.I.A., 2008: 199).

Current Situation

The reluctance on the part of a number of individuals to return to their native land is understandable given the extensive corruption, the irresponsible government, and the economic instability. There are several concrete examples of the overt corruption that plagues Equatorial Guinea.²⁷ Max Liniger-Goumaz confirms that: 'Obiang Nguema has been amassing credits in banks overseas (in Senegal, France, Switzerland and the United States); whereas the country's foreign debt has continued to rise' (1988: II). Indeed, with the discovery of oil in 1995, it has not been a difficult undertaking for

²⁷ For example, President Obiang received an annual payment of 1.6 million dollars in order to allow American companies to dispose of toxic waste on the island of Annobón. For a complete account see Max Liniger-Goumaz (1988: IV).

Obiang to solicit and appropriate foreign investment to be used at his so-called 'discretion'. These funds were not re-invested in the country, and as a result, the standard of living continues to deteriorate. Igor Cusack draws attention to the fact that the average person continues to live in fear of torture, imprisonment or even death (1999: 176). According to the Human Development Index (HDI),²⁸ in 1995, Equatorial Guinea ranked 142 out of 174 countries. This position improved to place them 127 out of 177 countries in 2007/2008, which translates to a higher standard of living. What the HDI does not take into account is 'inequality and difficult to measure indicators like respect for human rights and political freedoms' (Human Development Report, 2004). Due to the increase in the country's revenue from the investment in oil, the HDI status of the country has improved. Most recently, the 2011 HDI report gave Equatorial Guinea an overall rating of 136. By examining the Index trends since 2000, the country is placed in the 'Medium Human Development' category showing an average annual growth in HDI of 0.88 percent. This statistic demonstrates, according to the criteria set by the index, that Equatorial Guinea has achieved a stable increase in HDI over the past decade. However, this figure does not coincide with the testimony of scholars and writers such as Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel who maintain that a sub-standard quality of life still exists for the people of Equatorial Guinea.

Industrial Development

Globalisation has already reached this small African country, and has brought with it harmful effects on its internal development. For example, in the context of the schooling system, the large influx of foreign investment has resulted in the devaluation of education. Ávila Laurel states: 'Esto hace que sea más importante ser empleado de los petróleos que estudiar durante años para ser profesor' (2006: 128). It is counter-productive to invest in commercial and industrial development if there are no sustainable forms of education or healthcare. Many scholars fear that the exploitation of oil has the potential to destabilise what little solidarity remains in the country. One can speculate as to the variety of reasons why Equatorial Guinea yields what little resources

²⁸ The HDI is published as part of the Human Development report that 'looks beyond GDP to a broader definition of well-being. The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP), income.' (Human Development Report, 2004).

it has to foreign powers.²⁹ The simple response would be for financial gain for the ruling élite, but it has already been demonstrated that foreign investment and government funds simply do not filter down to the socio-cultural reality of the average Equatorial Guinean. The process of globalisation may also have other benefits which are less evident: the more Equatorial Guinea receives international attention for its natural resources, the greater the possibility that President Obiang will be subject to closer political scrutiny from powerful countries. This increased transparency could only have positive implications for the future of the country.

LITERARY TRAJECTORY

This section will focus specifically on Equatorial Guinean prose and aims to offer the reader a context in which to situate the contemporary authors in the wider framework of the country's literature. I will signal the foundational fictional texts in the field and underline the significant increase in publications since 1990.

The literary production of Equatorial Guinean authors has been steadily gaining momentum since the first creative work, *Cuando los combes luchaban: novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española*, appeared in 1953. They have created an interstitial space between African and Spanish literatures. . However, the emergence of Equatorial Guinean literature did not follow the same trajectory as the literature in other African countries, in part because it took place later compared to anglophone or francophone colonies (Ngom, 2003a: 585). Additionally, this literature 'did not develop side by side with the nationalist movement for freedom from colonial rule' (Ngom, 2001: 14). The unique cultural and political situation of Equatorial Guinea has meant that the literature produced by this country's authors has presented both an exciting and challenging opportunity for scholars who wish to investigate it.

In his prologue to the second anthology published in 2000, Mbaré Ngom credits the missionaries of the 'inmaculado corazón de María' for the publication of *La Guinea Española* which was first issued in 1903. This periodical circulated on the island as well as in Spain where it was seen as testimony to the success of the civilising mission of the colonial project. He notes that in 1947, it contained the first expression of

²⁹ Further discussion of this can be found in Ávila Laurel (2006: 130).

Equatorial Guineans which took the form of oral tales which were transcribed into Spanish and published in a section called 'historias y cuentos' (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom, 2000: 16-17).

Ndongo-Bidyogo cites the educational arm of imperial Spain for contributing to the emergence of Equatorial Guinean literature. Education was rigorous in its training and produced the first intellectuals of the country. He explains that they 'tomarán conciencia de la necesidad de asumir su propia identidad y fijar por escrito, en un castellano muy correcto y preciso, los aspectos fundamentales de la tradición de sus etnias respectivas' (2000a: 129). Therefore, the educated élite were engaged in a process of identity expression from the outset and these first written accounts of cultural traditions are understood as the origins of Equatorial Guinean literature. The following chronological subsections detail each of the literary movements.

First Generation

Cuando los combes luchaban: novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española, written by Leoncio Evita Enoy, follows a tribal leader in his battle against a group of 'leopard men'. He turns to an American missionary and former Spanish officer for help to defeat the group and rescue his son. The literature produced during the colonial period was marked by detailed accounts of a particular ethnic group and its interaction with the coloniser. At this time, Enoy's novel was used as an 'instrument of propaganda to show the positive results of the civilising mission of Spain in sub-Saharan Africa' (Ngom, 2001: 11). Daniel Jones Mathama's novel, *Una lanza por el Boabí*, published in 1962, can be categorised in these terms as it 'celebrates the colonial situation, but is strongly critical of his own people' (Ngom, 2001: 13). Although certain characteristics of native rituals and culture are contained within its pages, great effort is expended to present the colonial power in a positive light.

Los años del silencio

Following independence from Spain in 1968, Equatorial Guinea was subjected to the tyranny of President Macías during which time not a single novel was published. All intellectual activity was deemed subversive, and authors could face punishment by torture or possibly death. Ngom writes: 'El régimen de Francisco Macías se ensañó con

los intelectuales [...] que fueron perseguidos y eliminados de forma sistemática' (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom, 2000: 20).³⁰ This period, from 1969 until 1979, is known as *Los años del silencio*, a term coined by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo. Therefore, any literary or cultural activity occurred in exile. It is noteworthy that the majority of Equatorial Guineans who sought refuge in Spain were consequently subjected to censorship imposed by Franco until at least 1975. Most of the works that appeared during Macías' dictatorship took the form of critical or socio-historical texts.³¹

The literary silence experienced in Equatorial Guinea also extended to Spain during this period. The declaration of *materia reservada* in Spain meant that the circulation of information pertaining to Equatorial Guinea was strictly forbidden. In spite of the absence of novels, a small amount of poetry did appear.³² The suppression of cultural expression during the time of Macías has had a sustained impact on the development of Equatorial Guinean letters as many contemporary authors are still conscious of this period. The lack of role models for emerging authors to follow is a direct result of the aggressive censorship enforced by Macías and his administration.³³

Ndongo-Bidyogo signals that education as well as literature was eliminated within the country. Macías prohibited teaching and, to a large extent, the use of the Spanish language. During his eleven-year tyranny, illiteracy rates grew from ten to seventy percent. Another factor that contributed to the absence of writing during this period was the inaccessibility of light and paper (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 2000a: 132). Hundreds of Equatorial Guineans were studying abroad, mostly in Spain. Following independence in 1968, these students were abandoned by both governments and left to fend for themselves; many of them still reside in exile. The evolution of Equatorial Guinean literature was permanently altered by the Macías regime and it would take time for creative works to reappear.

³⁰ See also Ngom (2003:590) and Ndongo-Bidyogo (2000a: 131).

³¹ For example see also Balboa Boneke (1978) and Ndongo-Bidyogo (1977).

³² This is an interesting fact. However, further investigation into this phenomenon falls outside the scope of this project. For more information see Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom (2000: 141).

³³ Some of the authors publishing during this time were Francisco Zamora who used the pseudonym Reginaldo Abeso Roku and Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo who would use Francisco Abeso Nguema.

Nueva generación

It was not until the second dictatorship that authors began writing again and formed what is generally termed *la nueva generación*. For example, 1985 saw the publication of two novels: *Ekomo*, the first work of female author María Nsue Angüe, and *El reencuentro. El retorno del exiliado*, by Juan Balboa Boneke. It is evident that the novels which appeared during this period have more thematic substance than their predecessors, and are concerned with issues of identity. In 1987, Donato Ndong-Bidyogo published *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, the first novel of an unfinished trilogy entitled *Los hijos de la tribu*. This novel deals predominantly with the process of colonisation and the subsequent exile of the main character. The then-adult protagonist reappears in *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) where he returns to his country. Each novel represents a deeper immersion into the discourse of identity, and a more profound exploration of cultural issues that resonate and mould present-day Equatorial Guinea. However, during this period, identity is consistently framed in relation to a European Other.³⁴

The publications from 1980 onwards have been facilitated in part by ‘the arrival of democracy in the peninsula and from the lifting of restrictions that had been imposed by the Spanish Government of General Francisco Franco’ (Ngom, 2003a: 597). The newly acquired political freedom in Spain allowed for a renewal of publications in a similar way as the *golpe de la libertad* did in Equatorial Guinea. The Cultural Centre in Malabo ‘established the “Ediciones del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano,” and circulated two periodicals: *Africa 2000*, a quarterly review, and the monthly *El Patio*’ (Ngom, 2003a: 597). Although these creative outlets were in Equatorial Guinea, the novels that appeared during this period were written by authors in exile and published in Spain.³⁵

³⁴ The works produced by this generation of authors is particularly suited to postcolonial criticism. There is a palpable sense of resistance in their writing and it is a generation preoccupied with raising awareness of Equatorial Guinea and a voice to ‘those who are not normally heard or seen’ (Abrahamsen, 2003: 207).

³⁵ This issue continues to be relevant in the contemporary period. The majority of texts that are not self-produced are published in Spain. This has relevant implications of the potential readership of Equatorial Guinean literature. It also raises questions surrounding the active involvement of Spanish editors and the specifically western filters they impose on Equatorial Guinean writers.

Los años de la esperanza

Since 1990, there has been a notable increase in publishing activity. This period corresponds to what Trujillo has termed the literature of *los años de la esperanza*. Their success has been attributed largely to the efforts of the Cultural Centres (Ngom, 2003a: 598).³⁶ Located in Malabo and Bata, these Centres focus on five areas, one of which is culture. Local artists, musicians and writers are encouraged and supported to develop their talent. In the case of Equatorial Guinean authors, the Centres can act as a bridge to international publishers and readerships.

The contemporary authors chosen for this dissertation actively participate in cultural activities aimed at increasing awareness and fostering critical engagement with their works. The issue of readership is complicated and merits a much broader discussion than can be offered in this dissertation. However, Ávila Laurel's comments underline a significant problem affecting contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors, and that is one of publication. It is difficult to comment on the editorial process in this context, but it is possible to suggest that Equatorial Guinean writers are confined to a specific literary market which – it can be assumed – is not relatively profitable when compared to the mainstream. Since most, if not all, of the works included in this dissertation were published in Spain, this literature is being filtered first through Spanish publishers before reaching its readers. The novels that make it through this demanding process are then sold as 'world literature' or 'minority literature'. Interested scholars in Europe and North America are one definitive group who actively purchase these novels both for research and pedagogic purposes. That is not to say that there is no interest from the general population, however, without consulting statistics, it is impossible to comment on whom they are or where they live. Another dimension to be discussed briefly with respect to readership is the activity of the Centro Cultural Español. They house the largest libraries in Equatorial Guinean (Malabo and Bata) and

³⁶ The first Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano of Malabo (CCHG) opened in 1982 and 'was charged, among other things, with reactivating cultural life, promoting African and Hispanic culture in general and Guinean culture in particular' (Ngom, 2003: 597). This later became the Centro Cultural Español de Malabo (CCEM) and was moved to a new building in 2003. There is also a Centro Cultural Español de Bata (CCEB) that was opened in 2001. Both of these cultural centres are funded by the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI). The centres have five areas of development, one being to promote cultural activities in the local communities. The directors are Spanish and work with a small team in order to provide access to as many cultural events as possible. These include, for example, book presentations, art exhibitions, dramatic and musical productions as well as cinema. There is also a library where Spanish language texts are available to the general public.

frequently present books to the public which are then free to consult as part of their general collection.³⁷

Most of the writers associated with this new generation of Equatorial Guinean authors which emerged at the beginning of the 1990s reside in the country. As Mbaré Ngom rightly states, these authors “scrutinize a post-independence that has failed to meet the aspirations of its Guinean citizens’ (Ngom, 2003a: 598). The generational difference between these authors, who began writing following independence and the ones who came before, is notable for two reasons. Ngom explains that these authors were children during the time of Macías and, unlike their forebears, began their careers within Equatorial Guinea (2001: 33-34). Therefore, the criticism put forth by this new generation of authors is focused on ‘the immediate reality of the post-independence with its contradictions made of repression, lack of freedom, hardships, broken promises, corruption, and a country immersed in a deep economic crisis [...]’ (2001: 33-34).

The deeply critical tone of these works is primarily concerned with the current situation in Equatorial Guinea. Unlike the previous generation, the expression of identity is rarely in relation to a European Other. The introspective tone of their writing focuses more acutely on Equatorial Guinea. These authors rely on various literary strategies in order to frame their self-reflective discourse and, in the following chapters, these will be discussed.

The table below summarises the chronology of narrative publication using the temporal designations from Trujillo (2001: 528).³⁸

La pre-independencia 1950-1970

Etapa colonial 1950-1960	Leoncio Evita, <i>Cuando los combes luchaban</i> (1953)
La generación perdida 1960-1970	Daniel Jones Mathama, <i>Una lanza por el Boabí</i> (1962)

³⁷ This would constitute an interesting area for future research to investigate the dissemination of national literature within Equatorial Guinea. It should also be noted that theses cultural centres are operated by the Spanish Government and any future study should also include a critical evaluation of the Spain’s aims and objectives which could influence the presentation and promotion of local artists and their work.

³⁸ Trujillo and others employ the word ‘perdida’ can be problematic as it can be interpreted pejoratively. Although there was only one novel published during this period, there was a lot of poetic activity during this time. For example: Francisco Zamora Loboch and Ciriaco Bokesa, to name only two (Ndongo-Bidyogo, Ngom, 2000: 18).

La post-independencia 1970-1990

Los años del silencio 1970-1980	
El renacimiento 1980-1990	<p>Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, <i>Antología</i> (1984)</p> <p>Juan Balboa Boneke, <i>El reencuentro: el retorno de un exiliado</i> (1985)</p> <p>María Nsue Angüe, <i>Ekomo</i> (1985)</p> <p>Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, <i>Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra</i> (1987)</p>

Los «años de la esperanza»

Desde 1990	<p>Maximiliano Ncogo Esono, <i>Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos</i> (1994, 2000)</p> <p>Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, <i>El párroco de Niefang</i> (1996)</p> <p>Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, <i>Los poderes de la tempestad</i> (1997)</p> <p>Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, <i>Huellas bajo tierra</i> (1998)</p> <p>Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>La Carga</i> (1999)</p> <p>Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>Áwala cu sangui</i> (2000)</p> <p>José Fernando Siale Djangany, <i>Cenizas de kalabó y termes</i> (2000)</p> <p>Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>El desmayo de Judas</i> (2001)</p> <p>Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>Nadie tiene buena fama en este país</i> (2002)</p> <p>Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>Rusia se va a Asamse</i> (2002)</p> <p>Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, (Mbaré Ngom) <i>Antología</i> (2000)</p> <p>José Fernando Siale Djangany, <i>La revuelta de los disfraces</i> (2003)</p> <p>Guillermina Mekuy, <i>El llanto de la perra</i> (2005)</p> <p>Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, <i>Nambula</i> (2006)</p> <p>Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>Cuentos crudos</i> (2007)</p> <p>José Fernando Siale Djangany, <i>Autorretrato con un infiel</i> (2007)</p> <p>Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, <i>El Metro</i> (2007)</p> <p>César Mba Abogo, <i>El portador de Marlow: canción negra sin color</i> (2007)</p>
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Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>Avión de ricos, ladrón de cerdos</i> (2008)
Guillermina Mekuy, <i>Las tres vírgenes de Santo Tomás</i> (2008)
Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, <i>Arde el monte de noche</i> (2009)
Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, <i>Ecos de Malabo</i> (2009)
César Mba Abogo, <i>Malabo Blues: la ciudad remordida</i> (forthcoming)
Guillermina Mekuy, <i>Tres almas para un corazón</i> (2011)
José Fernando Siale Djangany, <i>En el lapso de una ternura</i> (2011)

Figure 1.1 Narrative chronology.³⁹

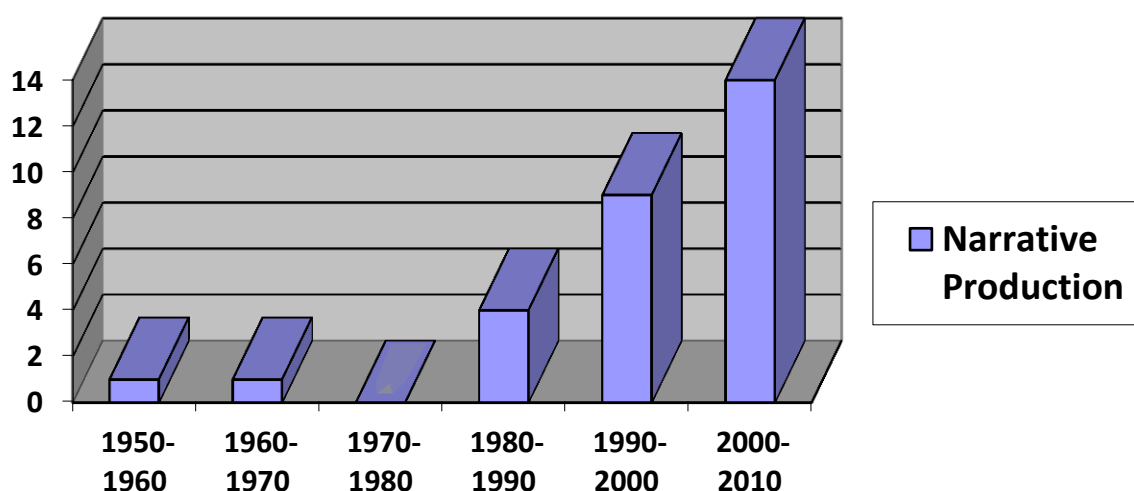


Figure 1.2 Graph of narrative production.⁴⁰

The table above signals the marked increase in literary production after 1990. This rise suggests that the obstacles that have previously worked against the development of Equatorial Guinean literature (for example, political persecution,

³⁹ Only narrative publications are represented here with the exception of the literary anthologies that were published in 1984 and 2000 respectively. The alternate spelling of Nkogo should be noted. In the 1994 publication of *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*, the author's name appears as Ncogo. In both of the subsequent publications it is Nkogo.

⁴⁰ This graph was created from the information detailed in fig.1.2. Works published after 2010 have not been included in the graph.

censorship, lack of access to publishers, and lack of resources) have been removed.⁴¹ This increase provides a sound basis for an examination of the different ways in which Equatorial Guinean writers broach the subject of identity.

Nistal Rosique suggests that contemporary Equatorial Guinean writers have emerged during a time of economic growth and have a more cosmopolitan perspective than previous generations of authors which will undoubtedly have influenced their choice of characters and settings and has shaped their expression of identity. She continues by stating:

Se caracterizan [...] por su visión crítica, tanto de los países coloniales como de las dictaduras africanas; por su euroafricanismo, en un intento de reducir las diferencias y dirimir las contradicciones, que es consecuencia de su conocimiento de los dos continentes en los que han vivido y estudiado [...]. (2008: 127)

For her, the knowledge and experience of both continents has contributed to this distinct outlook. However, Gustau Nerín, in the larger context, is critical of the amount of Equatorial Guinean literature that is published:

La escasez de obras literarias claramente ficticias inspiradas en Guinea Ecuatorial refleja claramente las dificultades que tienen los escritores guineanos para crear. La mejora del marco social y cultural debería repercutir, forzosamente, en una diversificación de los intereses literarios y en un enriquecimiento de la literatura guineana. (2001: 134)

Nerín raises a valid point given that the marked increase in literary production occurs within a limited scope. This comment is helpful in maintaining a balanced perspective on the subject. Nerín realistically indicates that, although in the field of Equatorial Guinean literary studies, there is a notable amount of publications, in the broader context of Spanish-language literature, it represents an extremely small percentage.

Equatorial Guinea's historical and political development has shaped and defined the way its writers express themselves through fiction. In the context of contemporary authors in particular, their literature is engaged with the social and cultural atmosphere of the country. Visible in the global arena for its natural resources, international attention has had a significant impact on the cultural material being produced in the country and its reception abroad. Furthermore, the Spanish language employed by

⁴¹ Ndong-Bidyogo refers to the author's ability to surmount these obstacles in a book section entitled 'Guinea Ecuatorial: literatura a pesar de todo' (2000a).

Equatorial Guinean writers means that it is accessible to a wide readership in Spain and the Americas and, more specifically, to literary critics. All of these factors combined provide a platform for the discussion of issues relevant to the current situation in the country, a component that has been absent from previous literary generations.

Foundational Critical Texts

At this point, some discussion of the ground-breaking critical texts on Equatorial Guinean literature will clarify the context in which the present study has been undertaken. In 1984, in Spain, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo published *Antología de la literatura guineana*. This is generally regarded as the foundation of Equatorial Guinean literary studies. For the first time, a Spanish-language audience was presented with a corpus of primary materials which included information about the authors and the particular socio-historical factors which facilitated the emergence of this literature. Prior to the publication of this anthology in Spain, from 1972-1976, all issues relating to Equatorial Guinea had officially been deemed *materia reservada* by the Francoist regime and could not appear in the press. Additionally, few Spaniards were even aware that the colony had existed.⁴²

Subsequently, Mbaré Ngom made substantial contributions to increasing the visibility of Equatorial Guinean literature. He began publishing in the early 1990s and his scholarly works have been fundamental in establishing a space for the study of Equatorial Guinean literature. In addition to numerous articles in scholarly journals, in 1996 he published *Diálogos con Guinea. Panorama de la literatura guineoecuatorial de expresión castellana a través de sus protagonistas* which contains interviews with thirteen different authors. In 2000, he co-edited, with Ndongo-Bidyogo, the second edition of the anthology, *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial: antología*. From the expository anthologies and interviews, Ngom progressed to a more detailed analysis of specific texts. This increased critical rigour is reflected in his later edited volume, *La recuperación de la memoria: creación cultural e identidad nacional en la literatura hispano-negroafricana* (2004), where, in addition to promoting awareness of Equatorial Guinean literature in the field of Hispanic studies, Ngom explores the broader area of

⁴² Ndongo-Bidyogo has devoted his career to drawing attention to Equatorial Guinea and its situation, particularly in Spain. For more details, see also Joseph-Désiré Otabela and Sosthène Onomo Abena *Literatura emergente en español: Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial* (2004) and *Entre estética y compromiso. La obra de Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo* (2008).

African literary studies. In 2003, he published an important chapter in *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* entitled 'African Literature in Spanish'. This chapter formally acknowledges Equatorial Guinea as a contributor to African literature as a whole and signals how this topic is gaining a foothold in the academic community.

In 2007, Marvin Lewis published *An Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea: Between Colonialism & Dictatorship*. Its value is twofold. Firstly, it examines a wide range of texts, thus fulfilling a similar function to the anthologies. Secondly, and more importantly, it also offers a coherent critical perspective, grounded in postcolonial theory, which is accompanied by extracts from creative works. Lewis has provided a decisive point of departure that goes beyond the task of merely assembling a bibliography. His generic focus is broad in the sense that he includes poetry, drama, short story and the novel, and he presents this material in chronological order of publication.

In 2010, Natalia Álvarez Méndez published a comprehensive monograph entitled *Palabras desencadenadas: Aproximación a la teoría postcolonial y a la escritura hispano-negroafricana*. Following a thorough discussion of postcolonial theory, she discerningly applies it to Equatorial Guinean literature. She offers a pragmatic approach that represents a significant contribution to the theorisation of Equatorial Guinean literature. Although her range of literary texts is limited, this work is an example of the more rigorous projects which are being undertaken in the field.

It would be impossible to highlight all of the contributions made by scholars involved in the study of Equatorial Guinean literature whose efforts have played an important role in making the shift from informative introduction to critical evaluation. The publication of articles and a noted increase in the production of doctoral theses devoted to Equatorial Guinean literature are but two indications of the growing interest in this subject.⁴³ In spring 2000 and autumn 2009, the *Afro-Hispanic Review* published special issues dedicated to Equatorial Guinea. Between 2008 and 2010, three international conferences were centred on Equatorial Guinea.⁴⁴

⁴³ Full references to these studies can be found in the Bibliography. Doctoral theses of particular relevance to this dissertation are: 'La formación de identidad en la novela hispano africana: 1950-1990' (Salvo: 2003) and 'The Question of National Identity in Equatorial Guinea' (Cusack: 1999).

⁴⁴ In 2006, an international conference entitled *La situación actual del español en África* was held in Malabo. In recognition of Equatorial Guinea's fortieth year of independence from Spain, international conferences were held in Madrid (November, 2008) and New York (April, 2009). In October 2010 the second international conference of Afro-Hispanic literary studies took place in Madrid.

The country and its literature have also been present in the classroom. A number of university departments have started to include Equatorial Guinean authors in their programmes of study, for example, at the Universities of Missouri, León, Guelph, Hofstra, Alcalá de Henares and Georgetown. It would appear that this subject is slowly being integrated into areas of critical study and is dispelling prejudices which refer to it as 'exotic' or 'rare'. Such terms are problematic and only reinforce Equatorial Guinea's peripheral status. The recognition of Equatorial Guinea as belonging to the Spanish-speaking world is something that will take time, but there are clear signs that the process is underway. An indication of this shift is the recent nomination by the Real Academia Española of five Equatorial Guinean academic correspondents who are collaborating with the Academy and the Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española in matters pertaining to the use of Spanish in the former colony (Yuste, 2009: 1). All of these efforts have helped to develop the field of Equatorial Guinean literary studies to which this dissertation makes a contribution.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO IDENTITY

It may be helpful to begin this chapter by outlining the reasons for choosing a particular theoretical model of identity as the main critical approach to the selected texts as opposed to other options based exclusively on postcolonial theory. It would be impossible to engage in this type of literary analysis without acknowledging the contributions postcolonial studies have made to the study of contemporary African fiction. The significant body of theory and criticism that exists in this area would comfortably permit an exclusively postcolonial approach to Equatorial Guinean literature and indeed, postcolonial theory has informed the complementary critical material on the conception of power relations and the notion of hybridity included in chapters Three through Six of this dissertation. On the other hand, recent criticism of postcolonial studies appeal for more interrelated methods in order to fully explore contemporary literature. Indeed, the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation responds to this observation. The issue of identity, or identity studies, will have sites of overlap with related theoretical models and can be viewed as one contribution to the broader exercise of engaging with postcolonial literature.⁴⁵

In their conclusion to *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin assert that ‘subversive manoeuvres’ are a defining feature of postcolonial writing which interrogates the relationship it has with the imperial centre. (2003: 221). Postcolonial texts are characterised by the ‘radical dismantling of the European codes [...] and a subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses.’ (2003: 220). The use of post-colonial theory to illuminate particular aspects of literary texts produced by intellectuals from former colonies thus contributes to ‘the gradual disturbance of the Eurocentric dominance of academic debate’ (2003: 219). However, more important still, postcolonial theory enriches the specific theoretical model of identity which will occupy the present chapter.

⁴⁵ Bart Moore-Gilbert in concluding his book *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, stresses the following: ‘Because postcolonial histories, and their presents, are so varied, no one definition of the ‘postcolonial’ can claim to be correct at the expense of all others, and consequently a variety of interrelated models of identity, positionality and cultural/critical practice are both possible and necessary’ (1997: 203).

While postcolonial theory focuses on the legacy or inheritance of colonialism, in the case of the *neo-independentistas*, their primary emphasis is not on the impact of the colonial past, but rather on the current reality of Equatorial Guinea. Although they are writing during what is broadly categorised as the postcolonial period, i.e. after colonialism, these authors focus on more pressing issues which are relevant to the contemporary experience under dictatorship.

Djangany is critical of the application of postcolonial theory to contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature, arguing convincingly that it is only appropriate for a small number of texts:

Si bien algunos críticos han puesto de relieve el modelo postcolonial como punto de referencia en la literatura nacional, nuestro juicio es que dicha argumentación no encierra [más] que poquísimas obras, y no resume el criterio de la ausencia de anticolonialismo primario en las obras literarias [...]. Pues de las obras en su globalidad no es acertado extraer como elemento argumental en sí “un proceso de confrontación” de la sociedad guineana contemporánea –en el plano social, político o religioso–, con lo que fue o dejó en herencia el colonialismo español. No vemos ni sacamos en conclusión la existencia en la literatura ecuatoguineana de una propuesta revolucionaria o subversiva, tendente a revertir el abolengo del orden colonial o a anular sus efectos, salvo en lo que se refiere a la violencia estatal y los procesos de sumisión del hombre al gobierno (2010: 147).

While it is true that there is ‘no one definition’ of the postcolonial, Djangany’s comments are useful in delineating the theoretical boundaries of the critical approach adopted in this dissertation. The ‘poquísimas obras’ to which he is referring would include for example, *Ekomo* (Nsue Angüe, 1985), *El reencuentro: el retorno de un exiliado* (Balboa Boneke, 1985) and *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1987). These works have been studied extensively from a postcolonial perspective and are invaluable in establishing Equatorial Guinean fiction as a legitimate area of study. However, Djangany’s comments point to the generational differences between the *neo-independentistas* and those writing directly following independence in terms of the focus of resistance. The contrast between the two can be broadly explained in terms of situational interaction. The previous generation was preoccupied with the relationship between Equatorial Guinea and Spain whereas the *neo-independentistas* are more focused on the current social dynamics under dictatorship within the country. It is impossible to divorce any study of Equatorial Guinean literature from postcolonialism due to the nature of the country’s history and cultural heritage.

However, in the context of this dissertation, the emphasis will be placed on the social theory of identity.

The absence of anti-colonial discourse in the contemporary literature of Equatorial Guinea is the central justification for not adopting a strictly postcolonial approach. Instead, the study of the selected corpus of primary texts reveals that the majority of criticism and resistance is addressed primarily to the current administration and not as much towards a colonial heritage. It is true that certain texts filter this resistance through a colonial past.⁴⁶ However, I would argue that this is a tactic employed by contemporary writers to avoid persecution under the present government.

Be that as it may, the theoretical model developed in this chapter can easily enter into dialogue with other work being carried out in the field. Although there are several topics which are complementary to the primary focus of this dissertation, for reasons of scope, these issues are not directly explored.⁴⁷ Throughout the remaining chapters, aspects of postcolonial theory are applied where appropriate in order to round off the application of social theory and to provide a more comprehensive discussion of identity expression in the selected literary texts.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a working definition of identity and of the mechanisms through which it will be explored in this dissertation. I will trace the sources of the theoretical model of 'symbolic interactionism' and outline its relation to other ways of exploring identity. It will be argued that contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors express identity *telescopically* through situational interactions. In order to isolate this process across a range of narrative texts, the critical focus will be confined to situational interactions between characters, and, in the case of Djangany and Mbomio Bacheng, between reader and text. The analysis will focus on the literal interactions between characters, but will also dwell on the figurative use of interaction. This means that at certain points in the discussion, different levels of interaction will be considered. There is a distinction to be made here in that the level between reader and text is not represented by dialogue, but rather by passages of description which create a symbolic interaction between the narrator and the reader. This additional level of exchange is relevant because it contributes to the overall understanding of identity

⁴⁶ For example *Autorretrato con un infiel* (Djangany, 2007) is set during the colonial period, although it is fictionalised.

⁴⁷ Such complementary approaches include but are not limited to: postcolonialism, gender, language, religion, dictatorship, orature, comparative literature, globalisation and feminism. It is notable that the issue of *Palabras: revista de la cultura y de las ideas* published in November of 2009 and devoted to Equatorial Guinea, contains various articles that explore precisely these issues.

expression. Whilst it relates less to the primary actors (as is the case of dialogue), there is much to be gained by contemplating how each author makes use of the reader/text relationship. While the primary line of enquiry remains firmly on situational interactions, this concept can be nuanced to include, for example, a narrator's perception of time or an author's use of intertextuality. The inclusion of these symbolic interactions in the text will aid in drawing overall conclusions about the particular ways in which each author negotiates identity in their respective novels. Furthermore, it will be established that a *telescopic* understanding of identity illuminates the mechanism of identity expression and aids in creating a link between the passages of dialogue and description. The final section will consider the benefits as well as the limitations of this approach.

* * *

Identity is a concept that inhabits different disciplines. My discussion will focus primarily on the contrast and dialectics between *agency* and *self*. I will build on ideas from both poststructuralism and social theory that precede the theorisation of postcolonial studies. Specifically, this dissertation accepts some of the tenets of 'symbolic interactionism', a theory which treats identity, whether conceived as 'stable and structured or as fluid and processual', as multiple and multifaceted.⁴⁸ In this chapter, the theoretical arguments surrounding identity will be explored with the aim of developing a syncretic approach to examining identity in literary texts. It is not to exclude the possibility of a strictly poststructuralist approach, but rather to demonstrate clearly that social theory is best suited to the investigation of identity expression in contemporary Equatorial Guinean texts.⁴⁹

In their general introduction to *Identity: A Reader* (2000), Paul Du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman begin by stating that the term 'identity' carries multiple meanings depending on context and disciplinary perspective. It is precisely this fluid and dynamic feature of the term that complicates its theoretical application, but it is

⁴⁸ Reynolds and Herman-Kinney (2003: 384).

⁴⁹ Poststructuralism has to a great extent informed postcolonial theory and in the broader context, belongs to the postmodernist movement. I have chosen to discuss the contemporary period of Equatorial Guinean literature in terms of *neo-independentismo* which is understood as a school of thought that unites the contemporary authors chosen for this dissertation. This movement coincides with the post-independence historical period.

also an invitation to specify clear boundaries and parameters of study.⁵⁰ In a suitable way, these authors observe that there are sites of overlap or common ground between disciplines (2000: 9).⁵¹ In this case, theories from social psychology which directly address issues of identity will be proposed as an appropriate point of departure for the present discussion.

Symbolic Interactionism

In the fields of sociology and social psychology, ‘symbolic interactionism’ is employed as a theoretical framework for the investigation of human behaviour supported by empirical evidence. Popularised in the 1940s and 1950s in America, it witnessed a decline throughout the 1960s and 1970s only to re-emerge in the 1980s and form an integral part of sociological thought (Stryker, 1987: 83-91). In this dissertation, the sociological framework is adapted to facilitate its application to literary texts. The most obvious assumption is that the fictional interactions examined in the literary texts can represent the ‘real life’ face-to-face encounters which symbolic interactionism addresses. It is true that literature does not provide ‘empirical evidence’. However, the principles of symbolic interactionism support the assertion that identity is expressed primarily during situational interactions, a phrase which unites the notions of situational identity and symbolic interaction.⁵² Therefore, fictional interactions can be analysed systematically in the literary texts with the aim of illuminating how each author expresses identity.

Drawing primarily on the work of the American pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer’s conception of symbolic interaction rests on three premises: ‘The first is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them [...]. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’ (Blumer, 1986: 2). For Blumer, meaning is generated in and through interaction, an important premise that will be adopted in this chapter. For the purpose of the present

⁵⁰ For example, see the article ‘Beyond “Identity”’ (Brubaker and Cooper: 2000, 1-47)

⁵¹ Du Gay, Evans and Redman focus on English-speaking cultural studies of identity and adopt an approach that they call ‘subject-of language’. Although their area of concentration is different than the one presented in this dissertation, their comments are useful as an initial contextualisation of identity.

⁵² The phrase ‘situational interaction’ has commonly been employed in the social sciences and is therefore not original in its usage in this thesis (Freese and Burke, 1994).

argument, the designation of identity as an ‘abstract object’ is fundamental since ‘the nature of an object –of any and every object– consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object’ (1986: 11).

Symbolic interactionists view a person as an ‘independent causal agent in the production of his/her own behavior’ (Stryker, 1987: 84). This is not to deny that human beings operate within a societal structure and have external constraints on their behaviour. However, even though these constraints may shape how, when and which aspects of identity are visible to others, this theory highlights the fact that individual agency exists nonetheless. Reynolds and Herman-Kinney explain:

As with other forms of identity, we control the information we convey about our personal identity, constructing narratives that define us as coherent individuals consistent across time and space, even as we embody multiple and sometimes disjointed social and situational identities (e.g. Goffman 1963). Thus, grounded in an interactionist orientation, we see that the self – and other – meanings we construct via enactments of self within social contexts forge our identities. (2003: 383)

The above quotation summarises the symbolic interactionist approach to identity formation and expression. Agency exercised in the expression of self and in combination with a social context, permits identity to emerge as a significant result of human interaction.

The Self and Situational Interactions

The conception of self is a major point of divergence between the approach to identity of social theorists, such as symbolic interactionists, and that of poststructuralists, and this has the most significant implications for the way in which identity is theorised. Whilst full engagement with this issue would fall outside the scope of this discussion, it is important to signal the relevance of this debate and to underline that there has been a conscious choice to retain the social theorists’ conception of self in this dissertation, with ‘self’ being understood as a synonym for ‘individual’ and ‘subject’.

Although symbolic interactionists and poststructuralists both reject binary oppositions, they conceive of the ‘self’ in different ways. This crucial difference is due to the fact that social theorists locate ‘the subject firmly within a social process [which is] defined and shaped by symbolic interaction’ (Dunn, 1997: 689). Poststructuralists, on the other hand, view the subject as constrained by discourse and maintain that ‘human thought and behavior are understood as discursive practices, constituted in and through the structures and uses of language’ (Dunn, 1997: 691). The conception of the

self as a product of social interaction, even when the subject occupies marginal positions within the social order, is the main assumption that underpins the central argument of this chapter. Symbolic interactionists maintain that objects derive meaning fundamentally through interaction (Blumer, 1986: 11, Stryker and Vyan, 2006: 7). Blumer's discussion of objects sees them classified in three ways: the physical, the social and the abstract (1986: 11). For the purpose of this dissertation, *identity* and *self* will be classed as abstract objects. This will allow them to be examined in terms of the meaning they carry for the actor,

If it is generally accepted that the conception of self is fundamental to expressing identity, it is significant that symbolic interactionists view the self as inextricably linked to relations with others (Dunn, 1997: 693). In discussing Erving Goffman and his classic work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Reynolds and Herman-Kinney explain that Goffman conceives identities as based 'on a bewildering array of information that interactants share during all face-to-face interactions' (2003: 374). Therefore, from its inception, symbolic interactionism has given precedence to face-to-face encounters. Following this model, dialogue between fictional characters has been chosen as the main focus of the textual analysis since such encounters and dialogue function as the primary site of identity expression. The term 'situational interaction' appropriately isolates the specific exchange that occurs in the 'constantly evolving present moment' (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003: 382).

It is the self, conceived fundamentally as a *social* entity, who engages in interaction either willingly or by necessity, and therefore 'enables the formation, transformation, and maintenance of identity' (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003: 382). In this way, the self and identity form a symbiotic relationship which is manifested in the social arena. Reynolds and Herman-Kinney expound this connection when they write: 'Identity is also the aspect of self that is most public, as it is perceived and interpreted during interaction with others' (2003: 368). In order to understand how the self negotiates identity, it is necessary to consider that the self is engaged in a process of action (Blumer, 1986: 7). It is this action, the mechanism of identity expression, which is of most importance to the current discussion.

There is one final point to be made with respect to the active role of the individual in expressing identity and that is the notion of 'performance'. Given the context of this chapter and the potential interest this may have for the reader, I will pause briefly to consider this issue. Many of the debates surrounding performance

focus on the ‘expectations attached to positions in organized sets of relationships’ (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003: 368). This is a central issue in academic circles that investigate human behaviour, and much work has been done to incorporate a theoretical understanding of performance in the humanities. One only has to consider the influence of Judith Butler, for example, and her work on gender and performativity in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Gender Trouble* (1990).

Most symbolic interactionists engage with questions of performance and role-identity and offer insightful ways of predicting social behaviour. Robert G. Dunn in his article ‘Self, Identity and Difference: Mead and the Poststructuralists’, compares poststructuralism and social theory. Dunn identifies a strong correlation between the two traditions as they are both derived from ‘radical critiques of Hegelian reason’ (1997: 689), but he criticises Butler for ‘lacking an adequate conception of social relations and a notion of self’ (1997: 687). In other words, performance and role-identity constitute a site of overlap between the two disciplines and the main point of divergence rests on the different ways of understanding societal influence during development of the self. Certainly, these issues are viable avenues for future research into the expression of identity. However, they will not be integrated into the theoretical model of this dissertation because the aim here is not to predict behaviour or to investigate social relations as major influences on the mechanism of identity expression.

The Self-Object and Agency

The present thesis adopts a symbolic interactionist view which privileges agency over constraint and this agrees with the view that ‘[w]ithin the contingency and indeterminacy of identity enactments, individuals must flexibly choose how to (re)construct and represent identities in face-to-face interaction’ (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003: 380).⁵³ Questions of human agency are intimately tied to the process of action referred to in the previous section. The focus of this section is to define agency as it relates to situational interaction in particular; the differentiation between agency in terms of one’s actions in the world; and agency as it pertains to the

⁵³ This view coincides with symbolic interactionists associated with the Chicago School (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003: 380). It should be noted that whilst it would be interesting to pursue this line of enquiry with a particular focus, for example, on gender, race or ethnicity, for the purpose of this dissertation, the concept of agency will remain ungendered. For further details on the subject of identity and agency see Woodward (2002: 20).

expression of self. This differentiation has been a point of debate in the human and social sciences, particularly as it relates to poststructural thought and to power relations.

Dunn traces the different treatment given to agency by poststructuralist and social theorists in their respective conceptualisations of self (1997: 696). Basing his observations on a theoretical understanding of Mead, Dunn writes:

Mead gave ontological primacy to the subject-object relation designated by the terms “I” and “me”, seeing this division and relation as the source or ground of grammatical structure in language. The grammatical structure of nominative and accusative cases in language, then, could be understood as a reflection of the subject-object duality inherent in the self. Furthermore, if we take the “I” in a Meadian fashion to mean simply the *activity* of the self (i.e., its *assertion* within a discursive structure), there seems to be no need to deny a prediscursive element to agency in order to maintain a discursive theory of identity formation. Indeed, it hardly seems possible to *have* such a theory without conditioning it on some concept of consciousness in which an “I” or its functional equivalent serves as agency of identity and behaviour. (1997: 696 [italics in original])

The divergence between social theorists and poststructuralists in the conception of self can be inferred from the above quotation; it can also be related to the issue of agency. By emphasising the ‘subject-object duality inherent in the self’ which is actuated through the assertion of ‘I’, Dunn accurately locates the agency of identity expression within the self.

Poststructuralists and postcolonial theorists would stress the self/other relationship in terms of subject/object. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin affirm: ‘Such a reciprocity allows mutual relations between self and Other in which both may at various times willingly function as objects for the Other’. Moreover, this relationship becomes problematic when ‘the oppressed is locked into position by the assumed moral superiority of the dominant group’ (2003: 170). In postcolonial theory, agency refers to the subject’s ability to alter his or her position in relation to the Other through discourse. Conversely, social theorists, and Mead in particular, position agency as part of a cognitive process that occurs within the self. The assertion of ‘I’ is the external manifestation of the agency required to reconcile the internal subject/object relationship. In other words, in order for the subject to engage in social interaction, he or she has already operatively selected which information to demonstrate to the Other.

Whereas poststructuralists conceive of agency in terms of power and social constraint, then, symbolic interactionists privilege agency in the act of expressing the

self. The reflexive process of social action ‘refers to the uniquely human capacity to become an object to one’s self, to be both subject and object’ (Callero, 2003: 119). In this way, it is not the outcome of the interaction or its broader social implications, but rather the action of engaging in social interaction in itself that requires agency.

Indeed, the individual is in possession of the self-object. Put simply, the assumption underlying symbolic interactionist theory is that human beings can be the object of their own action (Blumer, 1986: 12). Blumer illustrates this reflexive process with the following example:

Thus, he can recognize himself, for instance, as being a man, young in age, a student, in debt, trying to become a doctor, coming from an undistinguished family and so forth. In all such instances he is an object to himself; and he acts toward himself and guides himself in his actions toward others on the basis of the kind of object he is to himself [...]. (1986: 12).

The concept of agency as it relates to situational interaction is limited to the conception and expression of self. Framing the issue of human agency in this way does not imply that the subject is free from social constraints. Rather, it ‘attends to humans as active and wilful players constructing their lines of action. Not necessarily dismissive of structural and cultural constraints, symbolic interactionists tend to see such constraints as circumstances human actors take into account rather than determinants of lines of action’ (Stryker and Vryan, 2006: 6). Therefore, subjects possess free choice in the process of self-identification and differentiation.

Agency framed in this way does not automatically extend to the broader societal structure. However, there is an underlying assumption in this model that human beings are not ‘passive responders to stimuli’ (Mains, 2000: 2218). If the individual is not considered to possess agency over the expression of self, then it becomes impossible to consider the actions of resistance that are central to postcolonial discourse. ‘The self conceived in this way [i.e. reflexive] allows for agency, creative action, and the possibility of emancipatory political movements. It does not preclude the very real possibility that the self-regulating processes of reflexivity will come to be colonized by forces of domination and control, but it does show how resistance is always on the horizon of the possible’ (Callero, 2003: 120). As Callero rightly observes, the notion of agency is not entirely free from social control. However, by conceiving the self in this way, it allows for agency to be exerted within the limited scope of situational

interactions. Agency may not be sufficient to alter a socially determined position, but, in terms of being able to highlight or downplay aspects of identity during situational interaction, agency is still clearly utilised by the subject.⁵⁴

Individual and Collective Identities

Collective identity does not preclude individual identity; in fact, it has been argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two.⁵⁵ The complex relationship that exists between individual and collective identity is one that will be developed in my discussion of the literary texts. Guibernau and Rex point out that ‘human beings live within, and identify with, a multiplicity of groups according to occasions’ (1997: 4). This statement is significant because it highlights the situational nature of collective identity while, at the same time, affirming that collective identity is an essential aspect of the human condition. Moreover and more specifically, the tension that exists between the individual and the collective experience is at the heart of a sense of belonging, as it will be demonstrated in connection with the notion of *telescopic identity*.

The collective experience is shared by individuals who identify with a particular set of understandings. It is therefore the perceptions of the individuals that shape and solidify the collective identity. Often, the collective identity of a group supersedes or nullifies pre-existing group boundaries to produce a solidarity experienced by each member which is evident, for example, in reaction to a tragedy. This common experience can provide a point of attachment or situational identification between members who would not normally identify with each other.⁵⁶

One particular experience of collective identity is ‘national identity’. This term is problematic because not all collective identities emerge in the context of a nation.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ It is accepted that this model has limitations. For example, subjects cannot have control over the visible markers of their identity. However, Callero’s explanation of the reflexive self allows the subject to have agency without that agency necessarily being translated into social change. In most cases, subjects continue to occupy their place in the social system, but the agency they possess during situational interactions becomes visible when they highlight or downplay facets of their identity.

⁵⁵ Cohen writes: ‘[p]eople read collectives through their experience as individuals’ (1995: 178).

⁵⁶ With respect to literature, Ndongo-Bidyogo refers to this experience as a collective trauma, which can provide a literary stimulus as it allows authors to access collective memory that they can in turn evoke in their writing. This is also fundamental in any consideration of the role of identity discourse, impacting on feelings relating to self and nation (2006: 5).

⁵⁷ In the case of Equatorial Guinea, Igor Cusack has studied the emergence of a ‘national identity’ (1999c). His doctoral research explores complex issues related to efforts of the ruling élite to forge a national identity. In addition, he considers ethnicity, Hispanic inheritance and the collective trauma of the Macías dictatorship. Cusack’s work will be examined in Chapter five of this dissertation.

Although collective identities develop when individuals are in contact within geographical boundaries, they are not essential for the creation of the collective experience. With resonances of Anderson's *imagined communities*, Anthony Cohen suggests that people 'construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity' (1998: 118). This psychological construction is useful and will be employed in the textual analyses when relating the individual to the collective.⁵⁸

Telescopic Identity

Having outlined some of the relevant theoretical concepts relating to the study of identity, the subject must now be examined in relation to the sites of 'overlap' that will be critical to our understanding of identity expression in the literary texts of Equatorial Guinea. Significant to the current discussion is the issue of hierarchy and its function in the expression of identity.

Symbolic interactionists discuss hierarchy in terms of the likelihood that a particular identity will be utilised during situational interaction. This is determined by what is called 'identity salience', a term which refers to an organised cognitive structure.⁵⁹ Whereas poststructural theorists conceive of the expression of identity within a societal hierarchy, the telescopic model adopted for this dissertation does not. The understanding of identity expression as 'processual' is derived from Mead, but unlike the symbolic interactionists, it does not aim to predict behaviour.⁶⁰ The conception of telescopic identity defies the notion of a fixed hierarchy as this would preclude subjects from choosing which facet of their identity they wish to demonstrate during a particular interaction. Although it is true that the subjects take external constraints on their situation into account, it is nevertheless a distinctive feature of the telescopic model that these constraints are not fixed and may vary from situation to situation. Furthermore, it is important that the telescopic expression of identity does

⁵⁸ In the particular context of Equatorial Guinea, there are several ways to define the collective. For example, one could examine tribal identification, interaction, and relationship to the nation state. I acknowledge the potential interest this may have. My use of the term 'collective' refers simply to the broader social experience of individuals living within the country regardless of group affiliations.

⁵⁹ See, among many others, Hogg, Terry and White (1995: 257) and Stryker and Serpe (1982: 206).

⁶⁰ 'Blumer used Mead's processual approach to the human condition to compose an enduring framework for analysis of human conduct in a perpetually situated and ever emergent social context' (Blumer, Herbert and Thomas J. Morriane, 2004: 4).

not consider facets of an individual's identity in a hierarchical manner, but rather allows for each one to be carefully selected by the subject during the interaction.

A telescopic understanding of identity was developed in this dissertation in order to describe how identity is expressed during situational interactions. Like the apparatus of a telescope, rings (or facets of identity) can be extended and contracted, adjusting to particular situations while remaining in contact and overlapping. It is not the view through the telescope, but the profile of the object itself that informs this type of analysis. When the telescope is completely contracted, that is to say, when the fewest number of rings are visible, a broad definition of self is represented. As the telescope extends, the definition narrows to become more specific without sacrificing the connection to other elements. Depending on the situation, subjects can choose to highlight certain aspects of their identity. This element of choice is restricted to the definition of agency provided earlier in this chapter. It is acknowledged that there are certain aspects of identity that cannot be controlled in this way. For example, visible markers of identity as well as social position are factors that are necessarily taken into account by the subject during situational interactions. The importance of hierarchy is not to confirm or deny that it exists, but rather, to understand how it operates during situational interaction. It is noteworthy that societal hierarchy and identity salience are factors which shape human interaction. However, they must be considered as variable, in that they are not fixed and will vary from situation to situation. This flux is absorbed by the individual who selects which information is relevant for him/her to express during a particular interaction.

The notion of *telescopic identity* is being used for the first time in this dissertation. The term 'telescopic' is employed theoretically in mathematics in the structure of equations known as a *telescoping series*. The mathematical explanation of this term is interesting as it refers to the way a complicated equation can be broken down into identifiable components: 'The series is a *telescopic series* because its terms can be rewritten so that the partial sums telescope into a simpler expression' (Shuchat and Shultz, 2000: 370). Steven Ross Mayers of the University of San Francisco adopts the term in order to apply it to the issues of identity in his course 'Development: Writing and Identity in America'. The present idea was devised early on in the research for this dissertation in order to engage with the specific expression of Equatorial Guinean authors. It is unique in its application to literary texts and at the time of preparing this thesis, the term has not been encountered in any other theoretical context.

The development of the telescopic model has been informed by an anthropological understanding of ethnicity. Ronald Cohen's approach to ethnic identification determines that it involves 'nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness' (1978: 387). This model represents a rational attempt to reconcile the static/fluid issues of identity. The only difficulty with Cohen's model is that it promotes a hierarchy within the designations of identity. Although the process of negotiation is implicit in his model, it is the final designation that is privileged and not the actual mechanism of identity expression which could explain how or why subjects choose to define themselves in a particular way. Anthropologists like Cohen have been successful in demonstrating that ethnic identification operates in a situational manner, particularly in Africa. For example, Lily Kong in her consideration of ethnic identity explains the notion of a 'master identity'. She highlights that there is a difference between what the subject chooses to display in public and in private and ultimately she supports the claim that ethnicity is 'a phenomenological interplay between ascription and self-selection' (1999: 212). This perspective is helpful in conceiving of situational interactions as sites where subjects evaluate which information is appropriate to express while at the same time becoming aware of which identity has been ascribed to them by other actors during the exchange.

Similarly, while examining ethnic identity among Ghanaian university students, Joseph M. Kaufert observes: 'In a system of multiple ethnic loyalties, situations may be conceptualised as a selective "spot light" eliciting some types of identities and blocking out others. Every individual's definition of "in" and "out" groups, and even his primary response to the question "Who am I?", changes from situation to situation' (1977: 126). Ethnic identity will be explored, to some extent, in the literary texts, particularly as it relates the telescopic expression of identity during particular interactions.⁶¹

The telescopic approach is useful because it accounts for the subject expressing both fixed and changing elements of identity. This allows identity expression to be both static and malleable at the same time (or 'hard' and 'soft'). This, in turn, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the treatment of identity as a whole.⁶² Therefore,

⁶¹ For further reading on the issue of ethnicity and identity see: Max Weber (1997), George De Vos (1982a), Victor Uchendu (1982), Joseph M. Kaufert (1977), Don Handleman (1977), Thomas Eriksen (1993), A.L. Epstein (1978), George Devereux (1982), Ronald Cohen (1978) and Fredrik Barth (1969).

⁶² 'Hard' and 'soft' conceptions of identity are thoroughly explored in Brubaker and Cooper's article 'Beyond "Identity"' (2000: 1-47). They offer a critical review of the current debates in identity studies and compare and contrast the 'essentialist' understanding (hard), with the 'postmodern' (soft). This terminology will be referred to in the dissertation to indicate these opposing viewpoints.

telescopic identity is fundamental in accommodating the process of adjustment by the subject during the action of self-definition and self-differentiation performed in accordance with the subject's needs, mostly to benefit him or herself in a particular situation.

The use of a telescopic model as an approach to the study of identity in these texts emerged from initial close readings of the primary material. It is not an attempt to impose a specific agenda onto literary texts, but, rather, an effort to capture the unique way in which each author explores identity in his work. Through the systematic examination of situational interactions in the texts, it will become possible to make broader statements about the authors' individual treatment of identity expression.

Limitations

By restricting the focus of the literary analysis to situational interactions, this dissertation does not engage with all of the key topics present in the narratives. However, these issues are signalled where appropriate and are indicated as avenues for further research. The symbolic interactionist framework adopted for this thesis has been adapted to suit the analysis of literary texts. Therefore, there are certain aspects of symbolic interactionism which will not be utilised. For example, and most obviously one of the primary objectives for symbolic interactionists is to predict social behaviour. It would not be possible to examine social behaviour in literary texts in this way.

The choice to focus exclusively on situational interactions between characters also means that there is less emphasis placed on the public sphere. Although issues of social importance are signalled where relevant, this dissertation does not offer a detailed exploration of the societal structure presented in the chosen corpus of literary texts.

It is readily acknowledged in this dissertation that symbolic interactionism has been rightly criticised for its 'neglect of questions of power' (Dunn, 1997: 702). Bearing this limitation in mind, in Chapter Four, an additional model of power relations is adopted in order to account for the situational interactions examined in Nkogo Esono's texts. Similarly, additional theoretical material is offered at other points of the discussion to offset such limitations.

This model may also be criticised for its restricted use of postcolonial theory. As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, the justification for not relying

exclusively on postcolonial theory stems from a conscious decision to adopt a syncretic approach to contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature. In a strategic effort to illuminate the expression of identity, non-traditional modes of enquiry are combined to offer a pragmatic approach to the literary texts.

Benefits

The primary benefit of the present theoretical approach is that it can be applied to a broad range of texts. This dissertation is focused exclusively on the contemporary period. Similar projects that have adopted a panoramic approach to Equatorial Guinean literature have divided their attention across literary movements and genres.⁶³ As outlined in Chapter One, the contemporary authors selected for this dissertation hold great significance for the future of Equatorial Guinean letters. All of the texts selected for this dissertation have been created within the country and this is the first time that these texts have been studied as a corpus. This approach is complementary to other work being done in the field as it does not preclude any of the premises on which it is founded.⁶⁴

What becomes clear is that it is not a matter of taking one side over the other, or to argue that one theory/model is correct and the other is not, but rather, to develop a syncretic model that illuminates how identity is expressed in the literary texts selected for this dissertation. What becomes important then is to acknowledge that several aspects of various theories have been joined in a non-traditional way in order to provide one specific approach to an extremely complex topic. Identity is understood to be a site of overlap, or meeting place, of several different fields with their own characteristics and methodologies. It was a conscious decision to draw from eclectic sources in order to offer an approach to identity that would, above all, highlight the distinct ways in which each of the selected authors expresses identity.

⁶³ For example, Lewis (2007), Nistal Rosique (2008) and Álvarez Méndez (2010)

⁶⁴ The main divergence stems from the conception of self observed between poststructuralists and social theorists. The critical approach presented in this dissertation, specifically, the conception of identity expression as telescopic, could inform a complementary analysis of the literary texts.

CHAPTER THREE

DECODING IDENTITY IN JOSÉ FERNANDO SIALE DJANGANY

Djangany's works examined in this chapter can be set apart from the other texts that will be analysed in this thesis in terms of the complexity of the narrative style and the abstract nature of the concepts they express.⁶⁵ He has published numerous books, articles and essays. His most notable literary publications are: *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* (2000), *La revuelta de los disfraces* (2003) and, most recently, *Autorretrato con un infiel* (2007). In this chapter, I investigate how identity is expressed: identity manifests itself at a textual level primarily through situational interactions. The layered structure of his narrative demands the attention of the reader who is constantly engaged in a process of decoding. Situational interactions are the platform for the expression of identity in the novel. These are examined on two different levels. The first is in the literal context of human behaviour between characters and the second considers the more figurative uses which include the interaction between reader and text, the relation characters have with time and the function of intertextuality.

Other characteristics of Djangany's writing which colour his treatment of identity include the codification of information, the unreliability of the narrator and the representation of anachronistic time. Djangany does not assume that his reader is completely unfamiliar with the country's history and actively engages him/her in order to demonstrate the nature of identity expression as he conceives it. Additional theoretical considerations are made where appropriate.

Cenizas de kalabó y termes

Published in 2000, the novel *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* has frequently appeared in selected bibliographies of Equatorial Guinean literature.⁶⁶ However, little research has focused specifically on this text. This can most likely be attributed in part to the

⁶⁵ José Fernando Siale Djangany currently resides in Equatorial Guinea (Lewis, 2007: 173). Born in 1961, he has witnessed first-hand the transformations within the country, in particular the change in political regime from Macías to Obiang. He studied abroad in both France and Spain; at present, he is a Chief Legal Advisor in Malabo. Complementary material has been included in this chapter because Djangany has received the least amount of scholarly attention. It is also for this reason that it is substantially longer than the others devoted to individual authors.

⁶⁶ Kalabó is a type of wood used to construct dwellings. The spelling that appears in *La encrucijada de Guinea Ecuatorial* is 'calabó'. However, it would be fair to assume that it is a type of tree (Colectivo Helio, 1997: 34). Djangany adds that it means 'quality' or 'fine wood' (2009, email, 16 April).

relatively recent date of the publication and to the limited dissemination of Equatorial Guinean novels.⁶⁷

From the very beginning of the novel, the author draws attention to the socio-political situation in his country. He opens the text with a short parable:

Erase [sic] una vez una mujer que, viendo su cabaña ahuecada por los termiteros en los que pululaban numerosos insectos, prefirió echar abajo la morada para con las sobras del kalabó hacer una hoguera y asar una pata de cordero para sus hijos. Empero, a pesar del calor del fuego, los termes no perecieron. Brujería. Dijeron los vecinos. No, es el milenio, dijo la mujer. (2000: 9)

This epigraph gives the reader a sense of the narration which is to follow. Furthermore, he stresses that the termites are a destructive and resistant force which will withstand even the most drastic attempts to destroy them. In a broader context, this passage can be interpreted as Djangany's commentary on the social situation in Equatorial Guinea. The inhabitants are subjected to destructive forces and will even sacrifice their homes in an attempt to survive. Not only are the termites impossible to get rid of, the inhabitants themselves must still face their neighbours who are quick to turn on them.

Following the epigraph, Ciriaco Bokesa Napo, an Equatorial Guinean poet, introduces the novel.⁶⁸ He acknowledges Djangany as an important figure in contemporary writing and describes the text as an 'álbum de mensajes' and states that it is his honour to present the text, 'como la miel, es un privilegio para pocos' (2000: 12). His introduction establishes the novel within the larger corpus of Equatorial Guinean literature.

The prologue and the voice of the author are both important in shaping how the reader approaches the novel. Djangany writes: '[...] nosotros, los mismos guineanos, habíamos escrito muy poco sobre nuestra sociedad contemporánea, de lo que en ella vemos, de sus deformaciones progresivas, de sus defectos y de las abstracciones que de ella queremos hacer' (2000: 13). By using 'nosotros', he includes himself in a brief list of Equatorial Guinean authors. While he is correct in his observation that there is little written by Equatorial Guineans themselves, he exaggerates slightly since there are

⁶⁷ Justo Bolekia Boleká attributes the problem of the dissemination of literature to the fact that since independence, only two printing presses have existed within the country. He writes: 'Esto significa que todas las obras literarias impresas en Guinea Ecuatorial han pasado por el Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano de Malabo [...] muchas de ellas no llevan ni siquiera un número identificativo, es decir, el popular ISBN' (2005: n.p).

⁶⁸ His most famous work *Voces de espumas*, published in 1987, won the 'Primer premio de poesía "12 de octubre"' in 1985' (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom, 2000: 451). He is seen as a pioneer in the area of Equatorial Guinean literature and an inspiration for young poets. His collection of poems was the first of its kind published in Equatorial Guinea (Odartey-Wellington, 2005b: 190).

several texts that he fails to include in his summary of creative fiction, and does not allude to any of the critical texts that have been written. Djangany's assertion of his own identity as an Equatorial Guinean author helps the reader to contextualise the novel. Furthermore, he provides information about Equatorial Guinea that may be useful in interpreting *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*:

En un país donde se lee muy poca literatura, como es nuestro caso, difícilmente puede haber una censura en tanto en cuanto ésta es un examen que se hace de una obra antes de su publicación, para, en su caso, denegar la circulación de tal obra si los hechos relatados o las opiniones insertadas no complacen. Sin lectura no puede haber censura. He aquí una de las ventajas de la literatura ecuatoguineana del presente, aunque no niego que el defecto de lectura tenga muy serias incidencias en el desarrollo cultural. (2000: 14)

He explains that he wrote the book to inspire other Equatorial Guineans to write. This motivation is paradigmatic of the attitude that characterises his generation of writers. In the same way as he was inspired by authors who preceded him, he wishes to inspire others in an attempt to promote the emergence of more creative works.

Djangany states that he does not believe in self-censorship. He wants his reader to be aware of the circumstances in which he writes. The precursory work of Leoncio Evita, the author of the first Equatorial Guinean novel *Cuando los combes luchaban* (1953), is highlighted in order to distinguish what has come before. The author would be committing an injustice by remaining silent and Djangany establishes his novel within a continuum of authors with the hope of encouraging future generations.

Before identifying some of its predominant themes and issues, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the way the text is organised. The book is divided into two parts and seven chapters. It is important to note that each part contains several untitled chapters. Djangany frequently makes use of spaced asterisks to separate sections, specifically when changing scene or point of view. This technique functions as a less dramatic rupture than complete breaks and more conventional chapter separations, although these are also present in the novel to a lesser degree. The author signals the natural breaks in the story and ensures that the transition to the next part of the narrative is smooth and uninterrupted.

A concise overview of the plot will serve as a point of departure for the analysis. The novel uses the genre of the *Bildungsroman* and follows a young Ilde Wilson Peleté through his journey into adulthood. Traditionally, this genre inherently involves processes of identity formation over time. It is expected that the protagonist,

who, in this case, is also the first-person narrator, develops his identity through the accumulation of experiences. Political references and social commentary punctuate the novel. Prominent scenes point to the decadence of the country since gaining independence, as well as the effects of the dictatorship on the population. The plot develops in both rural and urban settings, offering comprehensive representations of each. Djangany denounces the political processes of the ruling élite and highlights the negative impact they have had on the country's infrastructure and its inhabitants. Ilde's identity is in a constant state of development throughout the novel: as he grows, so do the facets of his telescopic identity and he is shaped and defined through interactions with others.

Unreliable Narrator and Anachrony

The first paragraph instils doubt and sets the tone for the novel as the reader is informed that the narrator is under the influence of a drug called 'iboga'.⁶⁹ Ambiguity becomes an integral part of this text as it transmits feelings of uncertainty that are tied to the situational interaction created between reader and narrator. This lack of certainty is illustrated in the following quotation:

Lo acepto, que me corten la lengua ya, desde ahora, que me metan 'iboga' por todos los orificios hasta reventar sin previa extrema unción, si lo que divulgo a continuación para el conocimiento público, deviene de una tergiversación de los hechos acaecidos en la villa de Santa Isabel el día dos de febrero del año mil novecientos y pico. (2000: 19)

A recurrent device which can be identified in the text is the repeated use of 'y pico' as a temporal reference. This technique, coupled with the influence of drugs, leads the reader to conclude that the narrative voice is unreliable. The first-person narration is substantiated with the inclusion of historical facts that correspond to events in Equatorial Guinea's history, as, for example, in the transportation of his ancestor from Cuba in 1859.⁷⁰ Specific dates which correlate to actual occurrences creates the

⁶⁹ 'Ibogaine, a natural alkaloid found in an African shrub, *Tabernanthe iboga*, has been studied for the last several years for its putative anti-addictive properties' (Maisonneuve et al., 1997: 123). Within the syncretistic religion of the Fang, Bwiti culture uses iboga as a 'vehicle that allows men to reach God' (Binet, 1974: 35). As an area of future research, it would be interesting to investigate the ethnicity of characters and fictional representations of tribal interaction.

⁷⁰ This date is corroborated by Bolekia Boleká (2003: 55), although de Castro and Ndongo explain that the influx of Cubans to the island of Bioko occurred in 1862 (1998: 88). The transportation of emancipated Cuban slaves to the island of Bioko was part of a project aimed at facilitating the colonial presence in the territory. Fryer also dates the first influx of emancipated Cubans to the island in 1862.

impression that this is, in fact, a historically-based novel. Djangany juxtaposes concrete and verifiable dates with atemporal events and vague indications of time; accordingly, the reader is unable to follow the narration in a chronological manner and he/she is often left to question the passage of time. Although the reader has a clear sense of the sequence of events, the demarcation of time is unreliable.

The inability to be certain about the time in which the action takes place allows the reader to experience different time periods simultaneously. As Bolekia Boleká points out: ‘La obra de José Siale Ndjangany [sic] es una continua ida y venida del pasado al presente, es decir, de la época colonial a la época poscolonial, dando al lector la oportunidad de conocer y comparar ambas realidades’ (2005: n.p). Boleká’s description supportively demonstrates how this experience of time is beneficial to the reader. Furthermore, this simultaneous expression of both past and present emphasises the assertion that, in contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature, colonial and postcolonial – or *neo-independentista* to use Djangany’s term – realities co-exist. These different facets can be reconciled in the subjects as they are products of their socio-cultural environment. Therefore, any discussion of identity must be conscious of both the past and the present as they may influence situational interactions which are the primary sites where the mechanism of identity expression is experienced by the subject.

The use of ‘y pico’ also highlights the anachronistic quality of this novel and this contributes to the reader’s active participation. The temporal flexibility illustrated in the text also reflects the nature of the relationship the narrator has with the concept of time. As Susan Sniader Lanser notes: ‘Temporal distinctions are important indices of psychological and ideological relationships between the narrator and the story world’ (1981: 199). The temporal structure of the novel is significant when related to the expression of identity, as the narrator’s treatment of time can influence the nature of the situational interactions. It can also illustrate his judgement of events ‘by measuring the way a narrator temporally paces a particular content and the value of that content to the culture text or to the decorum of the particular story’ (Sniader Lanser, 1981: 201). Paying attention to the presentation of time reveals that the narrator is raising questions that reach beyond a simple portrayal of events, for example:

Between the years 1866 and 1869, more than 350 people were transported to Equatorial Guinea, specifically the island of Bioko (2000: 6).

¿Pasaba realmente el tiempo? Una profunda sensación de abordar siempre la misma fase temporal me albergaba [...]. Por eso el tiempo se paraba como esperando el desenlace para arrancar bajo nuevos auspicios. (2000: 202)

The juxtaposition of concrete temporal statements with vague designations of time involves the reader in deciphering the anachronistic nature of the novel while at the same time illustrating that the narrator expresses identity in a telescopic manner. The narrator's experience of time which is characterised by a lack of linear progress is significant if you consider the epigraph at the beginning of the text and the simultaneity of past and present. Djangany writes: 'El tiempo pasó sin que me diera cuenta' (2000: 50). The reliability of the narrator's own capacity to convey an 'accurate' account of time is thus compromised.

Expressing time in this context can easily fit into the telescopic understanding of how identity is configured in two ways. The first instance would have the broad or collapsed definition classified as atemporal or vague which is supported with expressions such as 'y pico'. Conversely, specific or extended definitions could be conveyed as the concrete expression of time such as 'el catorce de enero de mil novecientos cuarenta y siete' (2000: 99). Similarly, this model can be employed in a historical sense whereby the past is viewed in specific terms in contrast to the narrator's experience of the present which is broad or vague. This last point is interesting because, as the narrator progresses through time, the focus on the present also shifts, allowing the telescopic model to absorb the change as it occurs.

Lineage and Cultural Heritage

The discussion of time cannot be separated from the heritage of the protagonist. The narration begins with a historical account of Santa Isabel, while at the same time explaining how his ancestors came to the island.⁷¹ Tellingly, the name of the protagonist is not revealed until page forty; from a purely structural point of view, Ilde's name appears only after his ancestors have been acknowledged, thus reinforcing the notion that he is one part of a lineage. His ancestral identity significantly demonstrates his relationship as an individual to a collective. He finds the qualities of his ancestors desirable, and he feels that he is a part of that ancestry.

⁷¹ The name of the town is a historical indicator as to the time period. The name 'Santa Isabel' ceased to exist after Macías came into power. Therefore, the reader who is familiar with Equatorial Guinean history can deduce that the narrative begins prior to 1972 (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 234).

Continuing the focus on Ilde's heritage, the narrator provides a description of the social roles of his parents. His father 'era el guardián de toda la historia de Santa Isabel' (2000: 101) and, as the chief archivist of Santa Isabel, his job has great importance as he guards, and has access to, all of the town's historical documents.⁷² His mother is described in the following manner: 'Dicen los que conocieron a sus ancestros, que la sabiduría de aquellos ha recaído en ella' (2000: 48). The protagonist emphasises the roles of his parents in terms of their connection to the past in their respective ways. This connection subsequently feeds into the protagonist's ideas regarding his own identity as it establishes his role as an active participant within a larger history.

The protagonist's place in the continuum symbolises the past, present and future of 'los Wilson'. Ilde describes in detail the situation of his great-great-grandfather Hermes Wilson Boricó, with whom he feels an unconscious connection: 'Imité, sin saber el porqué, la postura exagerada de mi ancestro' (2000: 96). Ilde's imitation of his ancestor is confirmation that he is a product of that lineage and results in the ancestor acquiring an almost mythical status. Ilde's great-great-grandfather occupies a position of great respect and admiration. He is described as being an impressive individual who was said to possess magical powers, with the ability to make fire which could not be snuffed out by the rain as well as the capacity to be in two places at the same time (2000: 98). During the colonial period in Equatorial Guinea, Hermes was an accomplished colonial subject. He attained the status of 'emancipado', the highest level of social freedom, and was awarded a medal by General Franco (2000: 100). With this reward, Hermes secured a place for his son, Marcos, in the 'Escuela Superior Indígena' and thus he became the first one in the family to be educated.

Marcos received a colonial education and thus a level of cultural assimilation that was to be not only incorporated into his identity, but also passed on to subsequent generations. Ilde's cultural inheritance results in conflicted feelings about his own identity and he is not able to reconcile this part of the colonial past. The narrator details the readings which played an integral part in his ancestor's formation: 'El Quijote de la Mancha, San Manuel Bueno Mártir, El Alcalde de Zalamea, Don Alvaro [sic] o la Fuerza del Sino, Las Poesías Completas de un tal Espinosa' (2000: 100 [no italics in original]). Marcos Wilson also received 'la Medalla de no sé qué Cruz y Orden' (2000:

⁷² It is also important to note that the narrator woefully underlines the fact that he has had the same job for twenty-five years and has never had a promotion (Djangany, 2000: 41). This could suggest the impossibility of success within the colonial hierarchy.

100). Recognition by Franco is conveyed not only as a benchmark of honour but also a clear reference to a repressive period in Spain's history. The ironic indifference invoked by 'no sé qué' implies a distance between the narrator and the actual event. Feelings of remoteness expressed by the protagonist can be interpreted in historical terms, in that these events occurred a long time ago and are therefore no longer relevant to Ilde's current situation. However, it can also be viewed as an expression of cultural distance, as Ilde does not fully identify with, or understand, the 'honour' that was bestowed upon his ancestor during the colonial period.

Spain's presence in Equatorial Guinea produced generations of people who identified with Hispanic culture. Ilde's generation falls on the cusp of the transition between colonial subjugation and independence. He describes how colonial scholarships to study in Spain translated into being 'someone' in life.⁷³ The association of Hispanic education with personal success is particularly relevant when discussing issues of identity in Equatorial Guinean novels. The validation of colonial education marks the inclusion of Hispanic culture in the consciousness of Equatorial Guinean subjects. Ilde confirms this idea when he writes: 'Durante estos años, todos los jóvenes soñábamos con viajar para España, la madre de nuestra madre patria, nuestra abuela en suma' (2000: 104). Through the term 'abuela', Ilde distances his generation from the one(s) directly affected by colonialism. By regarding Spain as his grandmother, he is indicating an ideological distinction between himself and his ancestors, while at the same time acknowledging Spain's presence in the consciousness of his own generation.

In this novel, there is also a clear identification with Spanish heroes within the governing administration: 'el gobernador, que realmente se creía descendiente de la pata del Cid' (2000: 225). The description of the Governor's feelings of superiority are grounded in the assimilation of Hispanic cultural references as a result of colonial education. The reading list cited above references the official cannon of Spanish literature that is completely unrelated to life in Equatorial Guinea. Ilde does, albeit with an ironic undertone, emphasise the religious practices adopted by the population. He writes:

⁷³ '[G]racias a las becas de la Diputación Provincial y del Ministerio de Educación Nacional, él y su hermano llegaron a ser "alguien" en esta vida [...]. El hermano mayor de mi madre, un presumido de mucho cuidado, tras su beca de estudios en la península ibérica, se hizo importante' (Djangany, 2000: 34).

Cuando por el oriente asomaba su resplandor, la gente humilde, la abandonada a su pobre suerte se arrodillaba con un escapulario fluorescente entre los dedos para dedicarse a una de las pocas buenas tareas que les enseñó la colonización: rezar, orar, rezar hasta que los cielos se enteren. (2000: 114)

The practice of religious acts signals the imposition of Hispanic cultural values. The manner in which the adoption of religious practices is portrayed suggests that people can pray but that ultimately, it will not help them. Here, the narrator implies that religious education provided by colonialism still fails to improve the quality of life for the general population.

Indeed, the fact that Hispanic cultural values were accepted by the previous generations assumes implicitly that they may shape, to some degree, how Ilde expresses his identity. While revealing his feelings regarding his ancestors, Ilde states: 'Los Wilson, según mis recuerdos, siempre fueron bravos, aún con algunos defectos. Grandes agricultores, ricos, trabajadores, con fieles, hermosas y devotas esposas' (2000: 101). The narrator includes himself in this definition. A significant event connects the past and the present when Ilde's father abandons his work with the administration to cultivate the land of his great-grandfather. In an attempt to escape from the present and rejoin the past, the father's actions reflect an effort to recover some of the achievements of his ancestors. When Ilde and his father arrive at the plantation, they are shocked to discover that it has been destroyed over time. This space, a bridge between the past and the present, in its destruction becomes symbolic of the cultural effects of colonialism as it has now become inaccessible to future generations. Ilde's generation represents one that is forced to reconcile the different facets of colonialism. Having inherited the long-standing traditions of his ancestors and the forced assimilation of Hispanic culture, the unfruitful land represents a history that is no longer able to sustain his generation.

Ilde makes the decision to leave Santa Isabel in search of other possibilities, an act that is not unexpected of a young man in his position. His father questions his decision: 'Todos los Wilson han vivido y progresado en esta ciudad, ¿por qué quieres ir a un país lejano?' (2000: 115). The fact that all of his ancestors have remained in the same place is significant as the contrast with the 'outside' space will help to define the narrator's path towards self-discovery. Ilde must break his ties with the island in order to develop, yet he does not want to permanently lose his connection to his family. In fact, his journey can be understood as an attempt to define his place within the lineage

and to exercise the sense of responsibility he feels towards future generations. He says: ‘Me sentía emplazado, expresándose en mí la obligación de continuidad de nuestra historia, para culminarla en un reflejo que se extendería sobre todas las generaciones futuras de nuestra estirpe’ (2000: 102).

Ilde’s journey begins with a trip to the mainland where he hopes to stay with friends of his father. While he is there, he discovers that he is not the youngest in the family as his father has another child with a woman in Bata. The initial dialogue between the two brothers is a significant situational interaction in which identity is clearly expressed:

- ¿Cómo te llamas?
- Cielín.
- No, ese nombre no. Tu nombre de bautismo, ¿cuál es?
- Juan Julio Wilson Elembo. ¿Tú cómo te llamas?
- Ildefonso Wilson
- Entonces tú eres mi hermano mayor de Santa Isabel.
- Así es Cielín, así es, soy hermano tuyo.
- ¿Vives en Santa Isabel?
- Sí, vivo en Santa Isabel.
- Me han dicho que es muy bonita, mucho más bonita que Bata, ¿es cierto?
- Así fue, pero la estamos destruyendo, sólo quedan vestigios.
- ¿Qué son vestigios?
- Restos transitorios del pasado.
- Restos transitorios...hummm — repitió para sí
- “Y yo que me creía el último de los Wilson”. (2000: 129-30)

The brothers’ interaction reveals Ilde’s belief that he was the last of the Wilsons. The discovery of his half-brother changes his self-ascribed identity of being an ‘only child’ to one of shared inheritance. Moreover, Cielín attests to his father’s double life, and it is noteworthy that the younger brother was aware of Ilde’s existence prior to the meeting as it reinforces the idea that Ilde gains information regarding his own identity from his interaction with Cielín. Ilde reflects on his thoughts when seeing the boy for the first time: ‘Viéndole, mi corazón palpitó demasiado. Me dio la sensación de verme’ (2000: 129). His self-reflective statement demonstrates the effect the interaction has had on him. Facets of Ilde’s telescopic identity have been both shared and altered through his interaction with Cielín and thus results in a shift in his definition of self.

During his time in Bata, Ilde keeps three cherished items with him at all times, as they are his only possessions and represent his life in Santa Isabel. He explains: ‘Sobre la mesita de noche descansaban el collar de Oxi, el sombrero del tío Ilde, el daguerrotipo de mis ancestros’ (2000: 115). These three objects are outward

manifestations of his identity. Oxi was his childhood dog that was killed and symbolises the loss of childhood innocence. His uncle, after whom he is named, holds great significance as Ilde is the direct inheritor of his uncle's qualities. The third object is a visual artefact; that there can only be a single copy of this kind of photograph (Newhall, 1944: 40) reinforces the idea that Ilde cannot duplicate the identity of his ancestors.⁷⁴ Instead, he looks to them for guidance and keeps an image of them safe while pursuing his own journey of self-discovery.

Situational Interaction with the Other

Ilde's voyage to the mainland also gives him the opportunity to meet new people from different backgrounds, contact that is vital to the expression of identity as it forms the basis for situational interactions. There are clear moments of self-differentiation and the representation of the various ethnic groups, as well as Ilde's attitudes towards them, plays an essential role in his process of identity expression. Indeed, Ilde tells the reader that his ancestors are 'criollos' or 'fernandinos' (2000: 19). As described in Chapter One, the ethnic identity of this group is not as homogeneous as that of the Bubi, for example. The 'fernandinos' are a relatively small group that originated from freed slaves and who do not belong to the Bantu family (Cusack, 2001: 94). Nevertheless, they provide a point of reference for the reader and serve as a critical contrast when it comes to representing other ethnic groups.

Ilde's ethnic identity is called into question twice in the novel. The first incident occurs on the mainland where he identifies himself as being from the island and is incarcerated on suspicion of being subversive: 'Mi mala vena fue ser de Fernando Poo. Resultó sospechoso que me encontrase por aquí en estos momentos de "agresión exterior". Me encerraron en un calabozo mientras se investigaba mi caso' (2000: 185). In this instance, the situational interaction causes Ilde to downplay his ethnic identity, thereby broadening his definition of self in order to escape prosecution. Years later, upon his return from France, Ilde notices a drastic change in the behaviour of his countrymen, particularly in the airport. He witnesses beatings and abusive behaviour towards passengers attempting to enter the country. He reports specifically 'Paco

⁷⁴ This technique is considered a precursor to modern-day photography. Ilde's family has one of the original types of cameras and uses it to record the family. The fact that he has the only copy that will ever exist is significant on two levels. First, it demonstrates that he possesses the only photograph and it represents the physical evidence of his ancestors. Secondly, on a metaphorical level, he is the only 'copy' of them and as such, is entrusted with ensuring that they live on through him.

Álvarez' and 'Luis Ormíguez' among those who have been deported. These Spanish names allude to the strong Hispanophobia that was present in Equatorial Guinea, especially during the Macías dictatorship. Yet, when Ilde passes through Customs, he emphasises that he is a fellow countryman and '[el policía] no se molestó en escrutar mi pasaporte' (2000: 213). The sharp contrast in the treatment that Ilde receives from his countrymen reflects the political pressures experienced within the country. When bearing in mind the telescopic understanding of identity, the abuse that Ilde received as a result of his narrow definition as 'fernandino' on the mainland, compared to his broad definition as Equatorial Guinean which is rewarded in the airport, demonstrates that Ilde utilises the ethnic definition, or that facet of his identity, which is best suited to the circumstances.

Chapter Two has argued that identity is manifested during the subject's interactions with others and language can be considered to be an integral part of these interactions. Although most of the narration appears in Spanish, there are several instances where the use of other languages demonstrates Ilde's linguistic identity. Spanish acts as a unifying language that links the various ethnic groups by facilitating communication. The code-switching between indigenous and colonial languages represented in the text are examples that aid in understanding of how different facets of identity are expressed during situational interactions. When Ilde arrives on the mainland, he describes a scene of linguistic significance:

En el taxi, los pasajeros, casi todos de aspecto pueblerino, conversaban en dialectos desconocidos para mí, no obstante, comprendí que uno de los más locuaces contaba historias preocupantes a los demás, debido a las exclamaciones que se entendían en castellano, como: "¡Jesús! ¡José! ¡María!" (2000: 126)

Though Spanish serves as a means of communication between diverse linguistic groups, Djangany does illustrate that there is some variation in its use. For example, in a dialogue between a man and the President, the words expressed in Spanish are presented by the author as an attempt to render spoken Spanish into a semi-phonetic script: 'Bueriberi, hebíe [sic] dicho ofensas contra la población [sic] en general [...]' (2000: 171). This dialogue recreates the linguistic variation in Equatorial Guinea. Without entering into the debate surrounding standard and non-standard language, this example illustrates the use of Spanish to communicate across ethnic and linguistic

boundaries. More important still, this linguistic variation is conveyed to the reader as a result of Ilde engaging in situational interactions.

Equatorial Guinea not only employs Spanish to unify linguistic difference, but also as a mechanism of differentiation by which the country can distinguish itself from neighbouring Cameroon and Gabon. However, as a result of that very proximity to francophone countries, the permeation of the French language is inevitable. The French which is included in the novel demonstrates the linguistic assimilation of Ilde during his time in France. He describes how he integrates into the society after only seven months, using words like ‘bonyú-merssi’ in order to facilitate his cultural assimilation. The addition of French is proof of Ilde’s progress and its incorporation into his linguistic identity is an integral part of his development. The broadening of Ilde’s linguistic identity is Djangany’s attempt to represent the penetration of both the French language and culture in to Equatorial Guinea as a result of both geographical proximity and the return of inhabitants from abroad.

Just as Equatorial Guinea is exposed to other languages and cultures, so too is Santa Isabel. The town represents a microcosm of the country at large and therefore Ilde’s perception of the town is essential and reported changes in it and the surrounding areas are notable. Ilde’s descriptions of Santa Isabel to his half-brother prove that the town had lost its previous glory and that it was being destroyed actively by ‘nosotros’. Ilde emphasises the ‘small town’ nature of Santa Isabel, writing: ‘Como en nuestra ciudad esa clase de historias circulan con suma prontitud, mi padre se enteró’ (2000: 70). Although Santa Isabel is the capital of Equatorial Guinea, it maintains the characteristics of a village where it is impossible to be anonymous.

The decadence and decay of the city is mirrored in Ilde’s great-great-grandfather’s agricultural estate. As alluded to above, this plot of land symbolises the past and, at one time, was a thriving plantation. Ilde describes the current state of the cabins: ‘Las cabañas de kalabó mezclado con nipa [...] el clima devastador se ocupó de hacer pudrir toda la madera. Ni cenizas de kalabó encontraron. Los termes eran dueños y señores’ (2000: 103). The decay of the camp signals a clear rupture with the past. Just as Santa Isabel had passed her peak, so too has this plantation: ‘[E]l abandono de tanta riqueza a la merced de la letal naturaleza’ (2000: 103). The plantation emulates the decadence and devastation experienced in the city which, in turn, expresses the social deterioration of the country as a whole.

The plantation's termites symbolise a destructive force against which the infrastructure has no defence. Lewis argues that the 'termites are emblematic of the unrestrained, impulsive tendency to destroy everything within the government's grasp. The "termes" are symbolic of the Macías government that functions like the most destructive insects in nature' (2007: 174). After Macías came into power, there was no attempt to maintain the infrastructure created by the colonial project and the country slowly fell into ruin.⁷⁵ More significant still was the cost to human life as Macías and his followers were responsible for the death of many citizens. The symbol which emerges as the antithesis to the ashes and termites is that of the rose: 'Una hermosa rosa se había posado en nuestro portal, al lado algunos termes se paseaban en cenizas de kalabó, sin atreverse a rozar la flor' (2000: 235). Lewis suggests that the rose signifies hope 'if one has faith' (2007: 179). The juxtaposition of these ideas, both the physical contrast between the ashes/termites and the rose, and the symbolic opposition between destruction and faith, suggests that the narrator remains optimistic about the situation in his country.

Ilde identifies with Santa Isabel and will always see it as his home, even though he has travelled abroad. When he returns from France, he notices a huge decline in the standard of living of the population. The socio-behavioural changes that he describes, such as people urinating in the street, are significant shifts in the moral fabric of his community: 'Salía a las calles de la ciudad, Santa Isabel me pareció ser otra' (2000: 111). Lewis observes: 'Wilson Peleté's hope for an improved existence is shattered by the reality of poverty, degradation, hopelessness, and loss' (Lewis, 2007: 178). The changes that Ilde sees in his hometown also indicate the passage of time, as well as his newly acquired 'outsider' point of view. There is no doubt that the country has deteriorated since he left; nevertheless, the changes in his perspective are also indicative of his own development. His relationship with Santa Isabel has changed as he interacts with the town in a different way than he did before he travelled abroad. The disjunction between his experiences of home becomes emblematic of his journey of self-discovery.

⁷⁵ 'Como consecuencia de todo ello, la economía guineana desciende de forma drástica. La enseñanza, la sanidad, la Administración, las obras públicas, y en general, todos los indicadores económicos y sociales decaen hasta los niveles de pura subsistencia' (Ávila Laurel, 2006: 28).

Fantasy and Metafiction

Aside from the occasional use of humour and hyperbole, this novel largely is written from a convincingly believable point of view. In contrast, dream sequences, laden with political imagery, are described by Ilde, first and foremost, as ‘premonitorios’. This description suggests that the dreams can be interpreted alongside actual events. The first dream begins with ‘dos individuos muy feos’ (2000: 73), who approach a fat bearded man busy operating a large string-puppet. The two attack him and the string-puppet falls into what he describes as chaos:

En ese lapso, el títere, abandonado a la voluntad del próximo vendaval, se retorció, víctima de una mezcolanza en la que los predicadores devenían fervientes admiradores de la opinión divergente, las salamandras se tragaban serpientes, los gorriones se revelaban monstruosas aves nocturnas. (2000: 74)

Amidst all of this, Ilde discovers that he can fly when he falls from a Ceiba tree.⁷⁶ His mother shouts at him, telling him that he is too young to fly and finally he spends the rest of the dream in a never-ending tunnel.

The other dreams that appear in the novel are seen as extensions of this first one; they contain the same actors. These dreams convey the political history of the country: the fat powerful figure who manipulates the string-puppet represents Spain as the colonial power controlling Equatorial Guinea. The fat figure can be contrasted with the skeletal figures that Ilde describes in Santa Isabel. They are symbolic of a socio-economic imbalance. Venerable and fragile, the string-puppet is subjected to the ‘feos’ and others who each want to control: ‘para festejar la derrota del Gran Barbudo: la anarquía en el títere. Otros cogían al títere jugando con sus piezas, lo hacían girar al revés o lo dejaban bambolear indiscriminadamente’ (2000: 113). The fact that the narrator has these dreams suggests that they have emerged from his subconscious. The dreams act as a platform of expression from which to address the political failures of the country. In this sequence, Ilde has been established as an actor in the dream world and, consequently, is expressing, in a fantastic setting, his identity.⁷⁷ Although he is not

⁷⁶ The Ceiba tree is regarded as sacred and is used as the central symbol of the Equatorial Guinean flag.

⁷⁷ The use of the word ‘fantastic’ here coincides with Todorov’s definition: ‘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. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the

able to alter the dream's outcome, he participates and can offer the reader a unique perspective of these political events. In his prologue, Djangany himself declares: 'Ese sueño de Ildefonso Wilson Peleté que se confunde con la realidad en la medida en que sus temores repercuten directamente en él, es nuestra vida de todos los días, llena de ilusiones y de desilusiones' (2000: 15-16). Djangany thus suggests that the dream functions as the key to understanding this author's creative representation of Equatorial Guinean reality.⁷⁸

Thus far, my analyses have focused on this novel's characteristics and how they relate to Djangany's expression of identity in his narrative. The anachrony of the text, coupled with the unreliable narrator, can be seen as a situational interaction by soliciting the active participation of the reader. This process is in itself a commentary on the expression of identity, as the author conveys his underlying view on the issue through the promotion of self-interrogation, both in his characters and in his readers. The complexity of Djangany's writing, as analysed in different instances of situational interaction, creates an especially rich discourse on the co-existence and use of different facets of identity.

Autorretrato con un infiel

Published in 2007, *Autorretrato con un infiel* is Djangany's most recent work. Even at first glance, this novel seems quite different from *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*. The novel's epigraph: '«¡Viva la fuerza! A los que lloran, puñetazos en los ojos»', attributed to Ramiro de Maeztu. Unlike the acknowledgement of Equatorial Guinean authors in *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*, Djangany establishes an initial link between his novel and canonical Hispanic writing, specifically a writer of the *Generación del 98* who in the later stages of his career, became an active defender of *Hispanidad* and supporter of the *Falange Española*.⁷⁹ Djangany draws attention to this reference for two reasons.

uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event' (1973: 25). The fantastic is explored briefly in the work of Djangany and Mbomio Bacheng during dream sequences and supernatural episodes. The contrast with 'reality' should be interpreted as that which is experienced by the protagonist leading up to the fantastic scenes. It is acknowledged that there is much criticism devoted to representations of reality and fantasy. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, the fantastic is signalled only where it is directly relevant to the author's expression of identity.

⁷⁸ The theme of the fantastic in Djangany's narratives is worthy of further study.

⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion, see 'An Examination of Ramiro de Maeztu' (Nozick, 1954: 719-740).

Firstly, it summarises the general attitude of Spain towards her colonies in the heavy-handed dissemination of Hispanidad. Secondly, it includes Equatorial Guinea as part of this project and as a recipient of exported 'spanishness'.⁸⁰ The relationship between coloniser and colonised is one aspect that will be explored in this novel and the epigraph sets the stage for the reader.

Encoding and Layering of Information

Autorretrato con un infiel is set during the colonial period in a place called 'Póor Donanfer', formerly known as 'País Ecrónita' (2007: 17). In contrast to *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* where Equatorial Guinea was specifically named, Djangany creates an ostensibly fictional place in which his action can unfold. The novel's other named places do not seem to coincide with actual geographical locations, so it may be presumed that they too are invented. However, this apparent fictional world is the first indication of the complexity of the narrative: Djangany employs anagrams of present-day places to show to the attentive reader that he is referring to the contemporary situation. For example, 'Póor Donanfer' can be rearranged to spell Fernando Poo, the name of the main island of Equatorial Guinea currently known as Bioko.⁸¹ In addition, the reader is informed that 'Póor Donanfer' is an island, further corroborating the claim that Djangany is referring to Equatorial Guinea (2007: 82). The other names are reminiscent of actual places such as 'Isco de Corr' (Corisco) and 'Carlos San Basilo' (San Carlos, currently Luba).⁸² Additionally, there is a 'camp Boiobirth', a prison which is located on the shores of the ocean. This site represents the notorious Black Beach Prison in Malabo.

The act of decoding Djangany's locations is just one example which illustrates the complex nature of his writing. He carefully constructs a multilayered narrative initiated by the very origin of the text itself. Following the Cervantine tradition, the

⁸⁰ Nerín explains: 'Por lo que respecta al concepto de hispanidad, éste fue desarrollado por Ramiro de Maeztu en su obra *Defensa de la hispanidad*, publicada en 1934. Posteriormente, el franquismo se lo apropiaría como base de su proyecto nacionalista, y lo popularizaría entre el conjunto de la población española. La hispanidad consistía en la idea de la unión de todos los pueblos conquistados por España bajo una misma entidad común. Pero el verdadero marco de la ideología de la hispanidad era América Latina [...]' (1997: 11).

⁸¹ The rearranging of letters reveals an extra 'r' which does not match exactly the spelling of Fernando Poo. The author could be making reference to the English word poor, thus emphasising the socio-economic situation of Equatorial Guinea.

⁸² 'Basilo' could be a reference to the city of Basilé located south-east of Malabo, or possibly a reference to Bisila, the 'mother goddess of the Bubi people' (Garcia-Alvite, 2004: 150). In either case, these references would suggest that the action takes place on the island of Bioko.

narrator obscures the source of the manuscript by telling the reader that the novel is based on notes taken by Juvenal de Golas who wrote in scrawled handwriting: ‘Esas anotaciones originales han servido – con dificultad debido a la caótica caligrafía del autor – para la redacción de gran parte de esta historia’ (2007: 20).⁸³ Therefore, the narrative’s foundation is built on illegible notes that were taken from an oral encounter with two religious women. The Sisters relayed their account of the story, although the narrator emphasises that their imagination also plays an important role: ‘El resto ha sido completado gracias a la infalible memoria y desbordante imaginación de las hermanas de la congregación Oblatas de la Virgen del convento que se encuentra al norte de Civilianjaíl, que fueron entrevistadas para este menester’ (2007: 20). Like *Cenizas de kalabó y termes, Autorretrato con un infiel* presents the reader with a fictional account which appears to have a basis in reality. It is here where the levels of reality and fiction become visible to the reader.

However, the preliminary narrative frame is further fragmented to include a wider variety of sources. The initial ‘manuscript’, or the compilation of de Gola’s notes, was recopied and later encountered in Lácteo de Vilareal’s library. Unfortunately, this discovery was met with frustration as pages 240-252 are missing:

Resulta que en la embrionaria biblioteca personal del docto [sic] Congolino Lácteo de Vilareal, en Isco de Corr, se encontró una recopilación bastante extensa de lo que pudo haber sido, según ilustres investigadores, la leyenda de Póor Donanfer antes y después de adoptar dicha tierra este nombre, cuando asomaba en el mapamundi como el País Ecrónita [...] El descubrimiento también produjo cierta frustración porque, al haber sido arrancadas de cuajo las páginas desde la 240 hasta la 252, dicha mutilación propiciaba una duda razonable acerca del nacimiento de Hermenegildo Reho Bulëtyé.⁸⁴ (2007: 20-21)

The fictitious account is constructed within another, but is presented to the reader as fact. When discussing this type of metafictional technique, Stoicheff explains: ‘the product of its desire to expose the covert structures that allow fiction to masquerade as reality; it is always involved in the simultaneous processes of manufacturing illusion and revealing its artifice’ (1991: 89-90). By creating a story within a story, the author

⁸³ In an attempt to assure the veracity of the transcribed accounts, the reader is told that others have confidence in the notes taken by Vilareal de Golas. ‘[É]l no se inventa nada; mira lo que hacen los hombres y lo deja escrito para que los demás lo sepan’ (2007: 121).

⁸⁴ The renaming of Póor Donanfer, formerly País Ecrónita, coincides with the similar process undergone by the actual Fernando Poo, having been renamed Isla de Macías Nguema in 1972 (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 234) and then Bioko in 1979 (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 140). Equatorial Guinea as a whole was renamed following independence, formerly known as Spanish Guinea (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 115).

engages with 'a multiply-interpretive and highly self-conscious reader' (Stoicheff, 1991: 93). A reader who becomes highly sensitive to the levels of created 'reality' may therefore be more receptive to additional narrative strategies. In adding subsequent layers to an already complex narrative, the author creates more distance between himself and the text. As a result, the reader loses sight of the author's active involvement in the layering of fiction. This novel's metafictional quality is directly related to the manner in which Djangany expresses identity. Multi-layering his fiction forces the reader to participate actively in the text, a strategy which could be described as a situational interaction with the reader. The extension of this model to include interactions between reader and text accounts for the reader's active participation in Djangany's novels.

The uncertain origin of the story disturbs the reader's understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality. Adding a metafictional 'reality', verified by researchers and experts, provides a point of reference. Persuading the reader to be comfortable with the concept of layered realities from the outset allows Djangany to make subsequent departures from his already established framework, thus generating the labyrinthine nature of the novel. In contrast to the unreliable narrator who was balanced with verifiable historical facts in *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*, in this case the reader is presented with a reliable narrator who supports his claims with fictional researchers and invented facts. The layering of different original sources presents an abundance of material to the reader at the same time. Reed reveals the motivation behind this technique:

Multiple levels of information are received simultaneously, resulting sometimes in ambiguity, but ultimately allowing the receiver to discern order within the initial disorder. The message received depends on both the information emitted and the particular faculties of the receiver, who, by definition, has a subjective perception of what constitutes reality. (1994: 741)

The 'order within the initial disorder' is found in the corroboration of 'facts' that the narrator emphasises. This technique is employed throughout the text and provides a stable thread of 'order' which subsequently allows the reader to depart safely from the fictionally established 'reality' to be escorted deeper into the created fiction and episodes of the fantastic which might otherwise have been dismissed as unbelievable. It is necessary to produce the initial confusion in the reader so that order can then be re-established. Stoicheff suggests that 'metafictional texts are constructed so as to frustrate

and reorient the logical reader they posit' (1991: 91). The confusion which is produced at the beginning of the novel allows the narrator to 'reorient' the reader within the constructed reality.

One of the novel's stabilising characters is Isidoro de Hannón, a fictional researcher who resides in the colonising country of Porto Galo/Cabo Norte. He is described as an academic who has done extensive research on the colony and embodies the imperial discourse of the period. His research is quoted by the narrator: 'Según Isidoro de Hannón, quien retrata fielmente esta contienda en uno de sus libros' (2007: 64). The character of Isidoro de Hannón is consulted by the colonial administration in matters concerning the colony. His role will be examined in more detail with regard to the representation of colonial discourse.

The role of the researchers importantly creates verisimilitude and provides a contrast to the more fantastic elements in the novel. This metafictional addition to the text is often coupled with the interjection of the narrative voice and attracts the reader's attention to the constructed nature of the text. Often, the break in the narrative flow takes the form of a comment surrounded by brackets, for example: '(los estudiosos no son concretos cronológicamente respecto a este hecho)' (2007: 149). In this example, the narrator is making himself visible to the reader by pointing to ostensibly irreproachable historical research to corroborate his story. In another instance, the narrative voice apologises to the reader: 'al osado malandrín consumidor de pescado fresco y sexo aldeano (con perdón)' (2007: 174). The narrator's interruption also takes the form of footnotes that explain sections of translated text as well as 'original' letters presented as evidence. As the visible and active participation of the narrative voice reminds the reader of the metafictional frame which has been established, it also reinforces the narrator's claim to present the story as accurately as possible.

The novel, then, is complex in its composition and is representative of the author's approach to the expression of identity. The narrative sources come from notes taken by Golas, stories told by fictional characters, facts that have been corroborated by other documents (i.e. letters which are reproduced in the text with translations and footnotes by the author) as well as extracts of documents memorised by characters in languages that they do not speak.⁸⁵ The disparate sources involved in the production of

⁸⁵ César Augusto can recite texts from memory and even though he does not speak the language, he has memorised one in English: '-The council of ministers lends its full support to all efforts aimed at the immediate and unconditional liberation of all territories under Porto Galo and Cabo Norte's domination:

this novel illustrate that it can be interpreted as a kind of palimpsest, each level superimposed on the previous one. As the text moves telescopically between reality and fiction, it provides many levels of interpretation for the engaged reader. Therefore, the situational interaction between reader and text can be seen figuratively as a site of engagemment. The reader must infer meaning and be actively involved with the novel. He/she has to construct meaning in reaction to the complexity of the text and its features as described above. This process is an example of the different levels of exchanges that were described in Chapter Two of this dissertation and is a distinguishing characteristic of Djangany's writing.

Anachrony

It has already been stated that there is a colonial relationship between Póor Donanfer and Cabo Norte/Porto Galo. Although the reader can deduce that for Equatorial Guinea, this correspondence would place the novel's time period prior to 1968, the narrator obscures temporal accuracy and is therefore able to move freely within an atemporal frame, a similar technique to that employed in *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*, adding to the confusion of the reader who is unable to relate events in a chronological manner.

As in *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*, the author's use of 'y pico' is also present.⁸⁶ However, here he employs another technique which causes the reader to doubt linear time, as in the following example: 'Era un 21 de febrero' (2007: 126).⁸⁷ The selection of the indefinite article 'un' evades the specific classification of time and broadens the telescopic definition to one that encompasses all of the Februarys that have ever passed without designating a specific year. By relating events within this atemporal frame, the narrator invites the reader to question the sequence of events and even the historical period in which the novel is set.

There are infrequent references to concrete dates which can serve as clues to the attentive reader with knowledge of Equatorial Guinean history to aid in the decoding process. The narrator relates that Nicomedes Espíritu Sesinando '[n]ació en Peña de los Bueyes allá por el año mil novecientos veinticuatro' (2007: 149). He is chosen by the colonial administration to be the President of Póor Donanfer following independence. It

the so called Póor Donanfer (former País Ecrónita), Hacienda de Thomas Santz, Peña de los Bueyes and Isco de Corr...' (Djangany, 2007: 123).

⁸⁶ For example: 'Era principios de abril de mil novecientos sesenta y pico' (2007: 145).

⁸⁷ Other examples include: 'diciembre de uno de esos años que solamente recuerda con precisión un memorioso' (2007: 19) and 'Era un treinta de agosto' (2007: 40).

is not a coincidence that this is the same year in which Francisco Macías Nguema, the first President of Equatorial Guinea, was born. The reader is also informed that he was elected ‘en comicios posterior al año 1960’ (2007: 23). Without giving the exact date of his election, the author avoids naming the dictator directly, although this corroborates the hypothesis that Nicomedes is a direct reference to Macías.

Although the exact date of the narrative present is unclear, there are other clues which point to the transitional period between colonialism and independence. In the opening pages of the novel the reader is told:

El que por entonces tenía poder y mando total sobre ese trozo del mundo, por expreso mandato de Mercader III, era el insigne Florido el Blanco, conocido como el Omnipotente, cuya política expansionista conllevó la ratificación de la famosa Carta de Nacionalidad Religiosa (CNR). Y estas eran las condiciones en que se encontraba Civilianjaíl cuando, como una historia que pasa de puntillas, se produjeron los acontecimientos que aquí se relatan. (2007: 18)

This passage contains several points that merit further exploration. First of all, this section reconfirms to the reader that Mercader III is the leader of the colonising country. Secondly, it reveals that Florido el Blanco is an important figure in the colonisation process of the country. This is a reference to El conde de Floridablanca who was a protagonist in the negotiation of the territory in 1777 (Ndongo-Bidyogo, 1977: 20).⁸⁸ Thirdly, the ‘CNR’ bears a striking resemblance to the PUNT under Macías, or the PDGE of Obiang, a membership card that every Equatorial Guinean is obliged to carry which proves allegiance to the single political party.

The metafictional beginning of the novel superimposes layers of fiction and confounds the reader’s experience of time. In the absence of a clearly defined protagonist, the narrator conveys information and creates ‘face-to-face’ situational interactions between characters in the form of dialogue. Ancestral importance must not be overlooked as Baltasar and his relative Hermenegildo, although they participate in the narrative present, are clearly linked to the larger continuum of ancestors. Near the end of the novel, the power of the ancestors is evoked through an amulet and mysterious ashes when Hermenegildo uses their power to disappear. Bones are left in his place which date from the eighteenth century, the same year that the ‘primero después de los ancestros’, from whom Baltasar and Hermenegildo are direct decedents, had died (2007: 204).

⁸⁸ This information came directly from the author in an email received 27/03/09.

The disappearance of Hermenegildo is explained as a sacrifice, but also as a promise that he will return to protect the inhabitants of the island on one condition: ‘¡que los beséberes demostréis que vale la pena luchar por vosotros!’ (2007: 213). Significantly, the ending stresses the cyclical quality in the novel. Although, in this case, it is specifically referring to the perception of narrative time, it can also be relevant to the expression of identity. Collectively, the success of ‘los beséberes’ will ensure the protection of future generations while at the same time strengthening their sense of identity. The facet of identity defined as *beséber* is one which is shared by many and is maintained over time.

Colonial Discourse

The representation of colonial discourse in the novel is concentrated in Isidoro de Hannón’s arguments. During an academic conference, Isidoro de Hannón discusses his opinions of the *beséberes*, the local ethnic group of Póor Donanfer.⁸⁹ His presentation quickly turns into a dialogue with a member of the audience who questions his opinions. This gives him the opportunity to put forward his findings in more detail and the interaction evolves into a representation of a colonial encounter. The person in the audience keeps repeating the same question *¿por qué?* which forces Isidoro to clarify his statements. This dialogue permits the author to explore the opposing sides of the colonial argument. The following passage is revealing:

- Porque aquella gente es, por esencia, inconstante, perezosa, supersticiosa, versátil, susceptible, caprichosa, mentirosa, ladrona e inmoral [...].
- Disculpe – dijo un viajero de Póor Donanfer que aprovechó el silencio reinante tras la ovación que siguió a las palabras del eminente orador –. Estuve por ahí y le puedo asegurar que no vi nada de todo eso [...].
- Vaya usted a Isco de Corr o a Peña de los Bueyes y comprobará los hechos [...].
- Entonces – prosiguió el interpelante en medio de murmullos y gesticulaciones –, sigue usted convencido de que los beséberes son de una raza inferior y que la tutela sobre ellos se justifica a cualquier precio, incluso el de la sangre.
- Estoy convencido de ello [...]. Pero sigo pensando que es a veces necesaria la fuerza para con esa gente.
- ¿Y por qué? Deme una explicación – replicó el viajante.
- Porque Porto Galo llevó hasta aquellas tierras lejanas la fe cristiana, la civilización moderna, el espíritu de empresa, el hábito de trabajo y el sentimiento de la dignidad humana. No consideraremos terminada esta misión tutelar hasta que el hombre de

⁸⁹ It is possible that the *beséberes* are a fictional representation of the bubi. The similarities between the importance placed on ancestors support this claim. Bolekia Boleká writes: ‘La religiosidad del Bubi se manifiesta en los ritos que practica, especialmente dirigidos a sus antepasados [...].’ (2003: 23).

Civilianjaïl e incluso el de Peña de los Bueyes, Isco de Corr, Thomas Santz, no haya alcanzado el mínimo de plenitud; y si para ello fuera necesaria la fuerza, pero únicamente la fuerza justa, así será. Entonces, y únicamente entonces, podría ponerse término al fomento socio-cultural en Póor Donanfer. (2007: 95-97)

The dialogue continues and Isidoro argues that the civilising mission has been a success as some of the inhabitants have achieved the status of ‘emancipados’. He specifically mentions the success of a man called Apëllë Lökká who has renounced his identity as *beséber* to comply fully with the colonial administration. Isidoro’s contribution to the dialogue depicts the coloniser’s attitude towards the colonial subjects. Under the protection of the term ‘civilisation’, a structured effort to replace the existing facets of identity with that of the colonial power was made.

Few details are provided concerning the identity of the colonial power. However, there are clues which point to the possibility of Imperial Spain. The reader is informed that Cabo Norte/Porto Galo is a multilingual country: ‘todas las lenguas habladas en Porto Galo y en Cabo Norte’ (2007: 201). Unfortunately, this is not a clear indication of Spain due to the fact that, during the time of Equatorial Guinean colonisation, regional languages such as Catalan and Euskera were not officially recognised. Nevertheless, unofficially, Spain was a multilingual country. The other significant sign which confirms a Hispanic colonial authority is the existence of the *plaza de toros*. As the community unites for the event traditionally associated with Hispanic culture, this scene becomes significant as Baltasar, a *beséber*, kills a representative of the colonial administration (2007: 125). Symbolically defeating the superintendent within the bullring is a subversive act which embodies a collective resistance to colonisation.

In the novel, a neo-colonial discourse is propagated by Nicomedes Espíritu Sesinando. He is the elected President of Póor Donanfer and is supported by the colonial administration. If those responsible in Cabo Norte ‘tuvieran que apoyar a uno de los beréberes para la Presidencia, ese candidato podría ser perfectamente Nicomedes Espíritu Sesinando’ (2007: 150). This also reflects historical events, as Francisco Macías Nguema was a favoured candidate of the Spanish administration for the Presidency of an independent Equatorial Guinea. In his inaugural speech, Nicomedes states:

– Era realmente imposible estando en Cabo Norte y ante Franck Nkóh evitar el sentir una sutil opresión en la garganta viendo unidos a beréberes y cabonordistas; hablando

la misma lengua y rezando al mismo Dios [...]. La palabra «colonia», si alguna vez se ha aplicado en el pasado hablando de las relaciones entre Cabo Norte y Póor Donanfer, lo ha sido erróneamente y por los no cabonordistas. Pues Cabo Norte siempre ha llamado a lo descubierto, civilizado y catolizado [...] porque en ello nunca ejerció misión colonizadora; porque lo que tienen en Porto Galo y Cabo Norte en Póor Donanfer es Porto Galo. Es una parte de Cabo Norte: única, sola e indivisible, lo ahí esparcido. (2007: 147)

Nicomedes affirms Poor Donanfer's allegiance to Cabo Norte, rejecting the idea that it is in fact a colony. The solidarity expressed in this speech indicates a neo-colonial discourse emphasising the cultural homogeneity exemplified by language and religion. Francisco Macías Nguema also uttered his allegiance to the colonial power prior to independence: 'el pueblo de Guinea Ecuatorial quiere permanecer fiel y siempre unido a España, bajo la protección de su Caudillo'.⁹⁰ His sentiment of unity and allegiance was quick to change following independence; nevertheless, the examples demonstrate the similarities between the fictional and actual dictators.

Nicomedes has a moment of self-interrogation where he questions his authority and recognises his position as a dictator. Before he came into power, the inhabitants of Póor Donanfer '[i]dealizaban con algo mejor. No sabían en qué consistiría aquella bonanza, pero soñaban con otra cosa en el futuro [...] ya no sueñan esos que van por ahí. Sólo desean quitarme del poder o matarme' (2007: 199). Identifying his position as a dictator significantly demonstrates the shift that occurred following independence. If one relates this to actual events, then after the election of Francisco Macías Nguema, the population ceased to dream about the future. What is interesting here is that the fictional dictator himself expresses this idea, thus recognising the fact that he is detested by the population. The act of questioning his identity as a dictator reveals that this issue is relevant to all levels of society and that the impact of colonialism in this context can be seen to extend to those who were active participants.

Who is the Infidel?

In the novel, *Autorretrato con un infiel* is also the name of a painting by hermano Delatorre, a member of the colonial religious mission. He paints himself in the foreground and Baltasar, a *beséber*, in the background. Three months later, he paints *Soy negro, pero hermoso hijo de Dios* which portrays Baltasar on his own. The title of the second painting exemplifies the attitude of the missionaries towards the colonial

⁹⁰ Several sources, for examples see also Bolekia Boleká (2003: 96) and Ndong-Bidyogo (1977: 100).

subjects. The paintings themselves, as well as the paternalistic treatment of Baltasar, are used as justifications for the colonial project. In the first painting, Delatorre illustrates himself with the 'native', thus highlighting the Christianising objectives of the mission. In the second, he paints Baltasar in an attempt to demonstrate the success of the mission by emphasising that, in spite of his ethnic identity, he is still beautiful in the eyes of God. His ethnic identity is seen as a negative attribute but one that can be overcome with the help of Christianity.

Delatorre paints himself in an attempt to express his own identity through comparison with the Other. In a dialogue between the two men, Baltasar asks Delatorre: '¿Por qué siempre me buscas en tus ojos?' (2007: 44). This question suggests that Delatorre is differentiating himself from Baltasar and does seek to affirm his own identity through a gaze which is filtered through the Other. Delatorre replies by saying that he is not scared because he has lived his life according to what is in his heart: 'He sido yo' (2007: 45). By confidently asserting 'yo', he expresses himself as superior and relays his feelings of accomplishment during his 'civilising' mission in Póor Donanfer. The exchange between the two men illustrates colonial interaction as well as the process of self-differentiation that is vital to identity expression. The importance of perception is also noteworthy in this context as each of the men sees the other as the 'infidel' from the perspective of their own culture.⁹¹

Through his interactions with members of the mission and with supporters of Cabo Norte, Baltasar personifies colonial resistance in the novel. In addition to the symbolic murder of the administrator in the bullring, he voices the hostility of the *beséberes* towards the 'civilising' mission. He symbolises the complete rejection of all of the inherent features of colonialism and articulates these feelings when he says that the responsibility for the social failures of Póor Donanfer falls on the shoulders of the Cabo Norte: 'Lo que sí puedo decirle es que alguna responsabilidad, si no toda la responsabilidad, será de ustedes, cuando en Póor Donanfer reinen la desconfianza y el odio entre las personas' (2007: 45). This is, in a sense, a foreshadowing of the events that are to take place at the end of the novel. The hatred to which he is referring is echoed in the final paragraphs when the *beséberes* are left with painful feelings of sadness. After finally defeating the dictator, these emotions persist:

⁹¹ Nistal Rosique writes: 'En el caso de su título, pretende hacernos reflexionar sobre quién es el infiel, el colonizador o el colonizado' (2008: 125).

Empero cuando acabaron con aquello, a pesar de todo ese martirio, a pesar de tantos años esperando ese día, los beséberes y todo aquel que vino a saciar su vehemencia rebuscaron en los recovecos insondables de sus almas y descubrieron que todavía subyacía una punzada de tristeza e insatisfacción: «¡Coño! Mira que no se nos acaba el podrido odio ese de toda la vida». (2007: 224)

The ultimately negative feelings towards life, even after having defeated the dictator, indicate the lingering effects of colonialism. The connection here to Equatorial Guinea can be made by examining the decolonisation process. After gaining independence, the subsequent dictatorships did not allow for the reconciliation of colonial dominance as it was simply extended into tyrannical authority. This can explain the hatred that is experienced by the population following the defeat of the totalitarian character Nicomedes. Furthermore, if this character is seen to be related to Francisco Macías Nguema, the hatred would continue to grow in the collective consciousness as his rule was simply replaced by that of Obiang.

The leader of Cabo Norte/Porto Galo is Mercader III who is later replaced by Franck Nkoh. These names are suggestive of historical characters, for example, Franco, and the author highlights the realistic and outlandish accumulation of material goods:

Durante su estancia en palacio como hijo predilecto de Mercader III, éste había puesto a su disposición una inconmensurable riqueza compuesta por más de cinco mil millones de pesos en efectivo, tres cofres con oro y rubíes, siete baúles con colmillos de elefante, ochenta y cuatro piezas únicas de arte costumbrista, diez castillos y cuarenta fincas ubicadas en distintos lugares de Cabo Norte y Porto Galo. (2007: 107)

This excessive gathering of wealth exemplifies the view the inhabitants have of the colonial power. These are also subtle allusions to the relationship between Francisco Franco and King Juan Carlos. As a boy, Juan Carlos was sent to be educated in Spain and had extensive contact with the dictator during his formative years (Bernecker, 1998: 67). The connection depicted in the novel between Mercader III and Franck Nkoh ‘como hijo predilecto’ coupled with his subsequent rise to power in Cabo Norte, resembles that of the Spanish political figures. Unlike *Cenizas de kalabó y termes*, where Spain was mentioned specifically, in this case, the attentive reader relies heavily on subtle clues that allude to actual events in history.

The reader must constantly engage in the process of decoding in order to make sense of the text while. This active process allows for a deeper understanding of the text and a greater appreciation of the skill of the author. Historical actors can be viewed as having telescopic extensions of their identity manifested through the fictional

characters. The levels of separation between fact and fiction are reconciled by the reader as different facets of identity are emphasised, thus allowing the author to refer to a certain actor without providing actual names. As a result, this technique fruitfully increases the distance between actual events and the narrative, providing the author with a critical space in which to explore issues of the colonial encounter without restraint.

Situational Interactions between Characters

Deciphering the particular places and people is vital to the understanding of the text as a whole. It has been argued that the anagrams refer to actual places and that there is a strong relationship between the fictitious Nicomedes and the actual Macías. There is further evidence in the text which points to other non-fictional characters in Equatorial Guinea's history. The ways in which these individuals are represented may further illuminate how identity is expressed.

For example, Hadèsfaya's character is closely related to Nicomedes Espiritu Sesinando. He is considered to be his right-hand man and is empowered to work on his behalf. Hadèsfaya asserts his dominating position by pointing to the power entrusted to him by Nicomedes. This becomes apparent in a dialogue with an inhabitant of Póor Donanfer:

– ¿Ves esto? – [Hadèsfaya] le mostró al criador una insignia con banderitas que llevaba enganchada en la solapa del chaquetón –. ¿Sabes qué es?
 – Una decoración oficial, señor.
 – ¡Condecoración! – corrigió el recién llegado –. Y me la puso el mismísimo Nicomedes Espiritu Sesinando, mi amigo de toda la vida. (2007: 156)

The assertion of these facets of his identity in this exchange with a commoner emphasises the power which has been bestowed upon him by the leader. His identification with Nicomedes is deeper than simply referent power; his personal relationship with him is also a factor. In this instance, Hadèsfaya is highlighting the facets of his telescopic identity which give him an advantage over the Other.

The expression of Hadèsfaya's identity compellingly illustrates the treatment of the subject within the novel. Since his character is developed mainly through dialogue, Hadèsfaya becomes an example of how Djangany employs situational interactions in the context of identity. His evolution attains near-epic proportions when the reader is

told that news of him travelled ‘de boca en boca hasta los recovecos más recónditos de Póor Donanfer’ (2007: 179). Hadèsfaya even faces the challenge of meeting someone who is impersonating him, which creates an interesting opportunity to examine the mechanism of identity expression through situational interaction. Hadèsfaya confronts his double and says: ‘Y he venido a saber por qué te haces pasar por mí, robándome el nombre y vilipendiando a la población, violando sus derechos humanos, transgrediendo la paz y la felicidad reinantes’ (2007: 173). This statement is ironic as these are the same things that Hadèsfaya has been accused of doing. This form of self-interrogation and projection comes to light only by means of interacting with the imposter.

In a revealing conversation between Hadèsfaya and Hermenegildo, Hadèsfaya struggles to understand the motivation of the minority ethnic group:

– ¿Por qué luchas contra mí en una contienda cuyo fin no ignoras? ¿Qué buscas en realidad? ¡Mira lo que hemos hecho en Jubilea! ¿Por qué no huyes en vez de pelear? Aunque nos vencieras no podrías con Nicomedes Espíritu Sesinando. Para eso precisarías de un milagro. (2007: 190)

In this interaction, Hadèsfaya wants to know why the *beséberes* will not surrender. This fundamental question illustrates both a fictitious self-interrogation of a dictator as well as the nature of the minority ethnic group which is resistant to domination. Each of these elements demonstrates Djangany’s approach to the expression of identity and illustrates his treatment of the individual and the collective.

The reader is informed that the word *beséber* signifies ‘gente’ (2007: 22). Djangany is careful not to name a population directly; nevertheless, the translation points towards a collective identity. The first inclination is to equate the *beséberes* to the bubi of Fernando Poo. However, there is not enough information to make a clear comparison. What remains unambiguous is that the *beséberes* are a population of colonial subjects who represent a minority ethnic group on the island of Póor Donanfer. Prior to the colonial period, the *beséberes* ‘no habían sido diezmados por el alcohol y el miedo’ (2007: 187). They represent a population that has been subjected to the processes of colonisation including the forced assimilation of the colonial identity.

Framed as an academic discussion, Isidoro de Hannón engages in a dialogue with another intellectual from Cabo Norte. He asks: ‘¿Qué otra identidad, además de la que les hemos ortogado, anhelan adquirir?’ (2007: 100). The conversation that ensues with regard to the identity of the *beséberes* touches on issues of censorship, the destruction of natural resources and religious beliefs. These are issues which were

targeted by the colonial project with the aim of reshaping the identity of the colonial subjects.

One of the ways in which the administration exerts control over the *beséberes* is by requiring them to have their faces illuminated during the night:

Encendió la lámpara de keroseno que siempre llevaban encima los beséberes en cumplimiento de la normativa que les obligaba, cuando circularan de noche, a hacerse ver nítidamente sosteniendo una lámpara prendida a la altura de la cara. (2007: 137)

It is interesting that, by blowing out the light, a person becomes anonymous and can pass undetected. By concealing or illuminating the face, a person can either move freely around the island or, alternatively, be identified by a member of the administration and subjected to movement restrictions. Symbolically, this action represents the inhabitants' resistance to adhere to the rules in a subversive attempt to maintain their self-ascribed identity. Since the face is the most visible attribute of a person's identity, the act of concealing it becomes a method of self-preservation for the *beséberes*.

However, some *beséberes* sided with the colonial powers to secure their emancipation. Apëllë Lökká exemplifies this acceptance and instigates violence by turning on his fellow countrymen. In the initial description of Apëllë Lökká, his lineage is called into question. He is an orphan 'de padres nativos, aunque de abuelos venidos de no se sabía muy bien dónde' (2007: 54). The inability to trace his ancestors to Póor Donanfer distances him from other *beséberes* and could explain his willingness to identify with the administration. In contrast, Baltasar and his relative Hermengildo are clearly depicted as direct descendents of Böyölla Bulëtyé 'el primero después de los ancestros'.⁹²

In a situational interaction between Baltasar and Apëllë Lökká, he recognises Baltasar through one facet of his identity, as a revolutionary. Having supported the colonial administration, Apëllë Lökká is loyal to Mercader III and sees Baltasar as a traitor. He ignores every other component of his identity and chooses to focus on that one aspect, condemning him to death by reporting him to the authorities. At the same time, Apëllë Lökká identifies with political loyalty and distances himself from the ethnic tie that he shares with Baltasar. This form of differentiation is significant, as it demonstrates that, although the two men share a common ethnic identity, it is each

⁹² This phrase is repeated throughout the novel possibly imitating the oral style or just simply for emphasis. This specific sentence is found on pages 16, 21 and 69 with variations on pages 71 and 203. It is possible to suggest that this is reminiscent of techniques employed in the oral tradition.

man's self-ascribed identity which becomes more important. In this instance, Apëllë Lökká is emphasising the facet of his identity which he feels to be most beneficial to him at this time.

Individual and the Collective

In addition to the *beséberes*, the novel also presents the *cabonordistas*. As discussed before, evidence suggests that they are European. What is interesting is the way in which they are described. The only clue that the reader has which makes reference to the skin colour of the inhabitants of Póor Donanfer is the title of the painting *Soy negro, pero hermoso hijo de Dios*. When describing those from Cabo Norte, emphasis is placed on their skin tone. In the description of the first explorers to Póor Donanfer, they were said to have ‘un color de piel tan raro que centellaba bajo el sol’ (2007: 16). Djangany creates a visual image that allows the reader to imagine what they look like. For example, one of the landowners is involved in a physical altercation with Hadèsfaya: ‘Cuando acabaron con él, estaba rojo como un tomate, aunque en algunas partes de su cuerpo el colorido iba más hacia el de una zanahoria cocida’ (2007: 160). This scene illustrates the author's approach to differences in skin colour. The addition of humour possibly lessens the impact of the violent scene which has taken place but, at the same time, provides the reader with an image of the colonising population. The *cabonordistas* are contrasted with the *beséberes* who do share a common ethnic identity.

The *beséberes* also actively participate in a shared identity that facilitates a communal consciousness. They present a united opposition to both the ‘Regencia Administrativa’ as well as to the neo-colonial leader, Nicomedes Espiritu Sesinando. Although their uprising is unsuccessful against the colonial administration and ends in massacre, it is at this point when the *beséberes* collectively manifest their extreme hatred towards the oppressive power:

Pero no lloraban, y eso les enfurecía y les pegaban con más vehemencia, y salpicaban gotas de sangre, y la piel languidecía, y los corazones de los castigados se acongojaban, y nacía el odio desde el fondo mismo de sus entrañas. (2007: 133)

This episode is vital to the understanding of the *beséberes* as a collective as well as the identification of a common enemy. These feelings are called upon to defeat Nicomedes

Espíritu Sesinando at the end of the novel.⁹³ The shared experience of the *beséberes* is linked to their identification with the other members of the group but, most importantly, it is the communal suffering they experience that affords them the opportunity to succeed in defeating the neo-colonial leader. The death of Nicomedes significantly demonstrates the power of the collective identity: ‘Todos arribaban con el deseo y único objetivo de pegarle una buena patada a ese hijo de la gran... y tomar un vaso de vino de palma sobre su maloliente cadáver’ (2007: 223). Reacting against the oppression imposed upon them by one of their own is extremely pertinent to the current situation in Equatorial Guinea. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo discusses the aftermath of the collective trauma experienced in Equatorial Guinea:

De manera que Guinea Ecuatorial, a mi forma de entender, y una vez salidos del trauma colectivo que supuso la década de Macías [...] necesitaba definir con claridad sus señas de identidad. Y esos rasgos fundamentales de nuestra personalidad, de nuestra identidad nacional son, sin duda alguna, la fusión armoniosa de la hispanidad, adquirida a lo largo de nuestra historia, y los elementos afro-batús, heredados de nuestra tradición. (2006: 4-5)

The fact that this episode occurs at the end of the novel is significant as the reader is left with the impression that the *beséberes* are still experiencing profound hatred. Djangany crafts the end of the novel to leave the reader with a sense of hope. As a result of a collective effort, they succeed in defeating a common enemy, something that has yet to happen in Equatorial Guinea. The future of the *beséberes* has been touched upon earlier with the disappearance of Hermenegildo. The character vanishes when he harnesses the power of the ancestors through the use of ritual objects, thus sacrificing himself in order to protect the group.

These objects are enigmatic in nature and origin. The reader is aware of their preternatural powers and it is established that they are sought after by the colonial administration. There are four objects in total; a mysterious book *Kaurhemongo*, an oval mirror, the *eppá de tyíbbö* which is an amulet in the form of a bracelet and a bag of ashes, presumably of Böyòlla Bulëtyé. The amulet and ashes are used in combination with a recitation of appeals to the ancestors. The speech that accompanies these objects must be in the plural form: ‘Nadie de nosotros deberá meditar en singular. Esto lo sabéis. Todos los pensares se obligan a ser plurales. ¡Plurales! Si lo vulneráis, os

⁹³ ‘Descargaron toda la rabia y el odio contenidos durante tanto tiempo sobre Nicomedes Espíritu Sesinando’ (Djangany, 2007: 222).

saldrán pústulas, se paralizarán vuestros miembros diestros, o algo impensable os sobrevendrá...' (2007: 72). The use of the plural is of particular interest as it supports the identification of the *beséberes* with a collective and places the individual amongst the ancestors who are seen to have desirable characteristics that transcend time.

In addition to the bones that are left behind, there is an inscription on the wall that reads:

*Mis sufrimientos no cesarán
hasta el día de tus penas.
Porque sólo tu dolencia
será la medida
de aquello que teatralmente apelas
alianza.* (2007: 203)

The mysterious circumstances surrounding Hermenegildo's disappearance should not be overlooked as they are the catalyst for the *beséberes*' revolt against the dominant power.

Cabo Norte has several academics trying to work out what the amulet is and the power, if any, that it possesses. They conclude that 'la noción de especie no podía aplicarse al *epá de tyíbbö*, en tanto que se trataba probablemente de un pensamiento colectivo, y no de un simple objeto' (2007: 181). What appears to the *beséberes* to be the magical intervention of ancestors is discredited by the colonisers as a collective belief. It is not so much the existence of the object which is significant, but rather the fact that the same object is perceived differently by two separate groups. The juxtaposition of opposing views underlines the importance of perspective and subjectivity. Similarly, this notion can be extended to the expression of identity, particularly in the context of the colonial relationship. The way in which the *beséberes* view themselves is contrasted with the imposed identity the coloniser wishes them to assimilate.

Ritual Objects and Identity

Although the amulet possesses mystical power, its effectiveness relies directly on the strength of the collective. Therefore, the individual experience is symbiotically tied to the group as a whole. This bond confirms the influence that a shared identity can have over an individual. The other two objects that are involved in magical episodes are the oval mirror and the *Kaurhemongo*, which is said to have an unexplainable effect on its

reader. Without entering into a discussion of the supernatural, it is important to explore the effect these objects have over people and how they relate to identity. The *Kaurhemongo* causes the ‘desagregación física y mental’ (2007: 210) of any person who reads it. It is also said to contain the identity of the true leader of Póor Donanfer who is to take control following independence (2007: 211). The prospect of this information proves to be too tempting for Hadèsfaya and he succumbs to reading it, an experience which has both mental and physical repercussions. The inability to resist the contents of the *Kaurhemongo* demonstrates the power-hungry aspects of the leader’s identity and underlines the consequences of such greed.⁹⁴

Finally, the oval mirror would merit a more profound study of the supernatural powers it possesses. However, for the purpose of this reading, it is only the influence it has on the characters that will be considered. The mirror reflects ‘el fondo abominable de cualquier crapuloso – a la imagen de «un demonio transformándose en hombre»’ (2007: 118). The mere act of reflecting an image is relevant to the discussion of identity as Woodward explains: ‘[t]he metaphor of the mirror has enormous resonance across a wide area of cultural experience [...]. The mirror phase marks the beginning of the process through which identities are formed’ (2002: 19). It is the initial gaze outside of the self that acts as a catalyst for the process of identity expression. This creates an interesting tension as the mirror phase refers to the individual, whereas here, it can also be interpreted as part of a collective identity.

Like the painting of the portrait discussed above, seeking a reflected image of oneself becomes synonymous with the expression of identity. The fact that this mirror also distorts and produces an evil reproduction of the self is evidence of the destructive forces associated with the thirst for power. Through the simultaneous reflection of their images, Nicomedes and Hadèsfaya are transformed into a vicious beast:

– ¡No! – gritó desesperadamente Nicomedes mientras constaba que, con el luminoso foco de la linterna, su imagen y la de Hadèsfaya se reflejaban simultáneamente en la pantalla de un viejo espejo abandonado en aquel sótano: el espejo Óvalo [...] El Clostrobo estaba ahí. Descarnado y rojizo como el diablo. Unos dientes largos como el hambre y la mirada fulgurante sobresalían de todo aquel amasijo de carne surgido de las entrañas mismas del infierno. (2007: 218-19)

⁹⁴ There are many other interpretations of this powerful object which could be further explored with theories of magical realism. However, they would lead away from this study of identity.

Here, Djangany demonstrates the evil forces of power which operate through dictatorship. The 'Clostrobo' is directly related to the atrocities committed by those in power. If one extends this fictional account to Equatorial Guinea, it can be viewed as a representation of the horrific dictatorship led by Macías and followed by Obiang. The convergence of both images results in the creation of the beast and further emphasises the statement that this is a commentary on the cumulative destructive force of both dictators.

After the transformation of Hadèsfaya and Nicomedes into the beast, a significant act occurs: the *beséberes* trick him into moving onto sacred land and he is destroyed. The collaboration of the *beséberes* defeats the beast and they are able to circumvent his violence. Although the relevance to Equatorial Guinea is self-evident, it is important to underline the social commentary that, through the united front of the population, tyranny can peacefully be overthrown. Both the *Kaurhemongo* and the oval mirror influence the identity construction of Hadèsfaya and Nicomedes. In the course of the characters' interaction with the objects, the true nature of their identity and desire for power become evident. Additionally, the consequences of the ascension to power are apparent when the characters are destroyed and, in the case of Nicomedes and Hadèsfaya, this is accomplished by the collective force of the population.

In an indirect way, Djangany explores issues of decolonisation and politics within a fictional narrative frame. As previously argued, through the decoding of anagrams and attention to detail, the novel offers a potent social commentary which is relevant to contemporary Equatorial Guinea. The discussion surrounding identity is directly related to the decoding process. The identification of places and people makes the novel itself an artefact which telescopically mediates the relationship between reality and fiction. The fictionalisation of actual people and events and the filtering of contemporary issues through a colonial past create a distance which protects the author from accusations of subversion. In addition, the author focuses on atemporality, metafictional techniques and the identity of the ethnic group. Accessing the power of ancestors, together with a positive ethnic discourse, points to the survival of the *beséberes* and the collective solidarity which allows for the destruction of the dictator. This positive ethnic discourse empowers the ethnic identity that has been shaped by both colonisation and successive tyrannical dictatorships.

Djangany's approach to expressing identity in this novel relates both to the individual and the collective. By presenting the reader with a fictional colonial

relationship, he explores the attitudes and strategies that have influenced contemporary identity, in addition to the effects of dictatorship on the population. His specific ethnic discourse draws attention to the power of identity enacted during situational interactions and the way in which this can be utilised to enact change within the country.

La revuelta de los disfraces

In 2003, Djangany published *La revuelta de los disfraces*, a book of three short stories: 'La revuelta de los disfraces', 'Leonidas Glup' and 'Todo llega con las olas del mar'. Although all three of these are of great interest, only the third one, subtitled 'Las sombras de Mangro Road', will be discussed. Its significance lies in the author's use of protagonists created by other Equatorial Guinean writers. It was chosen as it most clearly exemplifies his approach to identity. This section discusses issues of life and death as well as intertextual borrowings and fictional identity.

A dedication appears at the beginning of each story which expresses the author's wishes and contains specific information pertaining to each of the texts. These dedicatory phrases have a dual purpose: not only do they contain references to Equatorial Guinea, but more importantly, they are directed specifically to its writers. This locates the text within the larger framework of Equatorial Guinean literature: 'A Francisco Zamora, Justo Bolekia, Donato Ndong, Juan T. Ávila Laurel, Joaquín Mbomio... y todos aquellos que cuentan nuestras historias' (2003: 69). It involves the characters produced by three of the authors in the dedication and therefore signals its intertextual nature. In Djangany's story, the characters are extensions of those created by other Equatorial Guinean authors.

It is argued that the metafictional narrative voice present in the text corroborates a situational interaction between the short story and the reader. Mbo Abeso is at the centre of this exchange as he engages with the fictional text from which he was created, thus emphasising the relationship between identity and narrative, as King highlights: 'It is commonly accepted that identity, or a sense of self, is constructed by and through narrative' (King, 2000: 2). Within Djangany's short story, fictional characters explore their own identities by means of situational interactions with other, pre-existing texts.

Intertextual References

The term ‘intertextual’ is used here in the sense defined by Gérard Genette as ‘a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts’ (1997: 1).⁹⁵ In this context, the word describes the specific references to texts written by other Equatorial Guinean authors. Marvin Lewis writes:

The third story is unique because it bridges the intertextual gap between contemporary Equatorial Guinea writers. The main characters are from novels: they are Mbo Abeso from *The Powers of the Storm*, Judas Garamond from *Judas Faints* and Father Gabriel from *The Parish Priest of Niefang*. (Lewis, 2007: 199)

These intertextual borrowings appeal to the reader’s sense of allusion, and previous knowledge of the texts is beneficial as Djangany uses these references as points of departure to create his own story.

Genette describes this kind of narrative as *hypertext*, and the novels from which they are being borrowed *hypotexts*. In broader terms, Genette assigns the term *transtextual* to this process describing it as: ‘all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts’ (1997: 1).⁹⁶ Djangany clearly demonstrates a conscious participation in ‘transtextual relationships’ when he includes these authors’ creations in his writing. It will be explored further to what extent he maintains the original ethos of the characters as well as the metafictional techniques he uses to represent fiction within fiction. This layered effect and intertextual borrowings are techniques which will shape the situational interactions both between characters and between reader and text. Similar to the act of decoding which was examined in his previous novels, Djangany’s approach to the expression of identity in this short story focuses on intricate character development and the relationship between reader and text.

The *paratextuality* of this short story is illustrated by the dedication discussed above. This dedication offers information to the reader outside of the narrative frame in

⁹⁵ The concept of intertextuality, as discussed in depth by Julia Kristeva in her book *Desire in Language*, is inspired by the study of Ferdinand de Saussure and M.M Bakhtin. Roland Barthes is credited with having carried out extensive work with regard to the written text and his article ‘The Death of the Author’ was highly influential in this area. It is also important to note the work of Harold Bloom and his book, *The Anxiety of Influence*, which profoundly examines this issue. Here, *intertextuality* is employed with a strict definition which comes from Gérard Genette and does not engage with the debate surrounding the genesis of the term.

⁹⁶ Genette defines five transtextual relationships which he views as ‘aspects of textuality [...] but they are also potentially, and to varying degrees, textual categories’ (1997: 8). He details the categories of *intertextuality*, *paratextuality*, *metatextuality*, *architextuality* and *hypertextuality* (1997: 1-9).

order to ‘provide the text with a (variable) setting and sometimes a commentary, official or not [...]’ (Genette, 1997: 3). In this case, the text is situated amongst other novels produced by Equatorial Guinean authors. The dedication also signals the *transformation* of the source texts, or *hypotexts*, into the *hypertext*. The *hypertext* is the ‘text derived from a previous text [or texts]’ (Genette, 1997: 7). By naming these authors in his dedication, Djangany indicates to the reader the origin of the *hypotexts*.

Julie Sanders discusses the same process in terms of *appropriation* and *adaptation*. Within these categories, Djangany’s short story would be classified as the former as a ‘sustained reworking of the source text’ (Sanders, 2006: 28). This is to say that the text is substantially influenced by the *hypotexts* identified above. Following Sanders’s argument, Djangany’s short story, as a cultural production, contributes to the ‘ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships’ (2006: 25). The experience of the reader is of interest as it supports the situational interaction between him/her and the text. If one considers the argument that identity is expressed through such interactions, it then becomes possible to include the reader’s experience in the investigation of this issue. The recognition of familiar characters in a new setting is similar to the process of assimilation and self-differentiation whereby an individual emphasises the identity of sameness through the discrimination of the Other. Here, the reader recognises the characters in a comparable way as he/she would recognise facets of his or her own identity in another. This sense of familiarity is both positive and reassuring.

Antonio Mendoza Fillola explores the meeting place between text and reader, calling it *el intertexto lector*. His argument, substantially shaped by reader reception theory, is focused on the development of the reader’s own intertext and views each act of reading as individual (2001: 252). This can be interpreted as the reader’s interaction with the text. Mendoza Fillola goes a step further stating:

En realidad, toda la actividad de interacción lecto-literaria se centra en la comprensión e interpretación del texto literario que [...] es percibido como signo y exponente de una producción (creación) cultural que se le ofrece al receptor. (2001: 38)

Each reader brings his or her previous knowledge and experience to the text which will, in turn, influence their interpretation or understanding of that text. This idea is important to keep in mind as the intertextual references in Djangany’s short story facilitate potentially different readings. As the author recaptures the protagonists from

other novels and casts them in a different light, the reader's perception of the interaction between the characters is enhanced if there is previous knowledge of the original texts, but such knowledge is not necessary. Djangany engages with previous texts produced by other Equatorial Guinean writers in order to establish himself as an active participant in the production of cultural material alongside those cited in his dedication.

The characters initially created by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel and Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng enter into a dialogue and are made to perform in a fictional setting for which they were not intended. The situational interaction between Mbo Abeso and Judas Garamond, specifically the dialogue at the end of the story, is the culmination of the intertextual experiment. This technique, employed by Djangany, leads to a prominent theme in the story which suggests that all identity is fiction. In addition, the way they 'read' themselves raises questions about the textual identity of the characters and to what extent they can exist outside of the story.

There are several instances where there is doubt as to whether Mbo Abeso is alive or dead. It is not taken for granted that the reader is familiar with the two novels by Ndongo for which Mbo Abeso was originally created. The information given to the reader is directly related to the second novel in which he appears, *Los poderes de la tempestad*. Mbo Abeso dies in Ndongo's novel; however, Djangany's character is unaware of this fact. When Mbo Abeso reads *Los poderes de la tempestad*, the actual reader also becomes familiar with the plot.

The second book Djangany references directly is *El desmayo de Judas*, a novel written by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, in which the character of Judas appears as a baby and then as a small child. The transformation of Judas from a child into a man is a creative leap which is made arguably in order that Mbo Abeso and Judas can interact as fictional adults. Playfully, Djangany explains that the author of the novel is 'oriundo de Ávila' (2003: 86). Judas, who was a minor character in the original novel, is re-cast as an essential character in Djangany's short story.

However one chooses to define the intertextuality of this short story, the fact cannot be ignored that Djangany is making clear reference to the other authors in his literary sphere and to works that have influenced his own writing. The *appropriation* of characters created by these authors is an obvious example of this influence. The use of the names of the protagonists and, to a certain extent, their personal history provides Djangany with the inspiration for his narrative. In addition to Mbo Abeso and Judas, he

alludes to the protagonist Gabriel in Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng's novel *El párroco de Niefang*. Mbo Abeso is led to Judas's house by the inscription he finds in the novel left behind in his hotel room. At the house, he encounters Judas' aunt who hands Mbo Abeso another novel. She says: 'Tenga también este libro. Si encuentra a Judas, por favor entrégueselo de parte de don Gabriel, el Párroco de Gnafein' (2003: 82). There are two interesting features about this reference: first, Djangany has written *Gnafein* and not *Niefang*. The anagram is puzzling as there is no apparent need for Djangany to transform the title of the text. However, it is a technique that is characteristic of this author. Secondly, to the reader familiar with the intertextual reference, Djangany has referred to the protagonist of *El párroco de Niefang* who personifies a hybrid identity. Although brief, the inclusion of Gabriel is not only intertextual, but also a weighted comment on the conception of identity.

Situational Interactions

The creation or exploration of identity through fiction operates on two levels. The first has been discussed above, that is, through the situational interaction between characters or between reader and text. The second way this is manifested is through a metafictional discourse. Similar to the metafictional elements discussed in *Autorretrato con un infiel*, there is an unambiguous narrative voice that discusses the reason for the *appropriation* of the fictional characters:

Era preciso darles una vida algo diferente. Una esperanza. Un último consuelo que les facilitase el tránsito, ayudándoles a quitarse la máscara. Es la sencilla razón de esta escueta narración, que enfrenta a los dos personajes en un intento por reconciliarlos con la vida, por hacerles sentir un aliento amical que fuera a la vez un catalizador para su propia purificación. El primo Mbo Abeso y a Judas Garamond se merecían otro destino. (2003: 72)

This passage pertains to the creation of identity through fiction as it centres on the extension of the already established identity of the characters. It also outlines the intention of this metafictional narrative voice to reclaim the identities of these characters and to help them reconcile some of the difficulties they experienced during their initial 'existence'. Re-casting these characters implies a creative process which requires the author, having already engaged with the texts as a reader, to add other

facets to the characters' identities within his own work. This interaction represents, in broader terms, what Genette has described as 'literature in the second degree'.⁹⁷

One final comment can be made regarding the use of the fictional layers and intertextual borrowings operating within this short story. It concerns Mbo Abeso's reaction when he discovers the novel that Judas Garamond has left behind:

Lo cerró para leer el título: Los Poderes de la Tempestad. Abrió de nuevo las primeras páginas, donde observó a la dedicatoria que el autor hiciera a la atención de quien seguramente fuera propietario del ejemplar. "A mi estimado leyente Judas Garamond, el mejor de los lectores que he conocido – rezaba la inscripción –, deseando que esta leyenda te sirva de permanente mirada hacia atrás, como siempre lo has aconsejado, para un mejor futuro. Atentamente, Donato." Luego venía la firma del autor y, cosa curiosa, una fecha: 23 de febrero de 1968 [...]. (2003: 78)

This passage demonstrates how the metafictional discourse operates within the short story as well as in the indispensable relationship between reader and text. The metafictional voice is the author of *Los poderes de la tempestad*, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo. It is metafictional in the sense that it represents the construction of fiction within the short story. Judas Garamond, a fictional character, is transformed into the ideal reader of Ndongo's novel. The importance of the dedication as *paratextual* information to the reader, in this specific context, creates an additional level of interpretation as the fictional characters are also readers. The appropriation of an authorial voice which is directed to Judas Garamond using the informal 'tú' is also significant as it stresses the intertextual dialogue and the interconnectedness between contemporary authors and texts. The implicit meaning of this dedication within the short story represents Djangany's promotion of a dialogue between contemporary authors and his calling for a 'permanente mirada hacia atrás' so as not to forget what has come before. Djangany, actively participating in the production of contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature, demonstrates that it can contribute to a better future as long as authors are conscious of the past.

An additional noteworthy feature of this passage is the date which is described as a 'cosa curiosa'. This can be explained by the fact that *Los poderes de la tempestad* was not published until 1997. The inaccuracy of the date signed by the fictional Donato is more significant to a reader who is aware of the date of publication of the original text. The year 1968 is the year in which Equatorial Guinea gained independence from

⁹⁷ This is the sub-title of his book *Palimpsests* quoted earlier in this section.

Spain. The interpretation of this date, as an event which needs to remain at the forefront of the contemporary author's mind when creating fiction, reveals the extent to which these authors are influenced by Equatorial Guinean reality. One final comment can be made on the contents of *Los poderes de la tempestad* which would support the call for remembering the past. It is notable at this point that its nameless protagonist is subjected to the tyranny of the Macías dictatorship. For that reason, the date which, at a glance, appears to be an inaccuracy, does, in fact, signal the importance of preserving history in order to create a better future.

Encoded Information

The function of anagrams in Djangany's novel, *Autorretrato con un infiel*, may help to decipher the information that is encoded in this short story. It has been argued earlier in this chapter that concealing information creates a critical distance between reality and fiction. The decoding process is an integral part of this short story, a technique which Djangany perfected when he wrote *Autorretrato con un infiel*. The fact that Gabriel held in his possession a copy of the text in which he is also a fictional character substantiates the complex relationship between existence/identity and fiction. Does he exist because he is written? Similarly, Mbo Abeso holds in his hands a copy of *Los poderes de la tempestad*, a book that Judas has read and, according to the message on the inside cover, in which he is mentioned directly as the intended reader. This inscription demonstrates the intertextual dialogue that is involved in both the act of reading and writing. The text as an artefact, then, can be interpreted as having an active role in the construction of identity as well as being the source of the 'fictional' existence of the protagonists and the primary site of situational interaction. Within Djangany's narrative 'reality', there is an additional level of interpretation where protagonists, born from fiction, possess those novels as objects demonstrating that they 'exist' because of them. The complex relationship between existence/identity, as a result of fiction encompassed within a short story, is demonstrative of reader's engagement as a result of Djangany's writing style. In this way, similar to *Autorretrato con un infiel*, identity is expressed within the text as well as by the text itself and its engagement with the reader. Equatorial Guinea's literary tradition — as fixed in its major writers and in the books they have written and the characters they have created — is, according to this story, a determining factor in the way contemporary authors

negotiate identity. In addition, Djangany's short story becomes symbolic of contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature as a whole by rendering influential texts visible to the reader. Identity, then, appears to be inherently *intertextual*.

The engagement of the reader is critical in the text since the narrative voice explains at the very beginning that Mbo Abeso is dead. The intertextual reference is less important than the details about his death. Mbo Abeso 'fue arrestado por hermanarse con un sedicioso que vino de allende con ideas desafinadas. Desmenuzado físicamente, echaron sus restos cuantificables a los cuervos de pelaje negro, tras separar sus bíceps para manjar de ilustres y séquito' (2003: 74). The narrative voice describes, in detail, the end of Mbo Abeso's life in *Los poderes de la tempestad*. It may also appear to foreshadow his death, or to serve as a technique to discredit the protagonist. Lewis expresses Mbo Abeso's situation as '[t]he dialectic between life and death [that] is being acted out by two fictional characters in an extraordinary display of literary intertextuality' (Lewis, 2007: 199-200). In order for this dialectic to be 'acted out', there has to be the doubt in the reader's mind as to whether or not Mbo Abeso is alive.

There are other instances when the reader is left to question Mbo Abeso's physical state. He suffers from what he describes as a tropical fever, when he is photosensitive and suffers from hallucinations: 'Durante el sueño la fiebre tropical sirvió sus efectos, el Primo Mbo sufrió altas temperaturas' [...]. Un cuerpo como si estuviera muerto' (2003: 87). His health is in decline, and this leads the reader to speculate, or even to become suspicious, about whether or not the protagonist is alive. Lewis explains that Mbo Abeso is 'a skeletal apparition wearing a hat, a ski mask, dark glasses, and a long cape' (2007: 199). This macabre image creates doubt in the reader's mind and is essential to the situational interaction which is to follow between the protagonist and the fictional character, Judas Garamond.

The interaction between Mbo Abeso and Judas Garamond is the key to deciphering the identity of the story's protagonist. Judas possesses insight into Mbo Abeso's situation and shares that information with him. In order to fully understand Judas Garamond's actions, it is important firstly to examine Mbo Abeso's relationship with the original text in which he is also a character. It has already been stated that Mbo Abeso found a copy of *Los poderes de la tempestad* in a hotel room which had been

occupied by Judas Garamond.⁹⁸ This text bears an inscription from the author to Judas, who is posited as the ideal reader of the text. Mbo Abeso's connection with the text significantly underlines the importance of the relationship between text and reader. In addition, it is this novel which leads him to Judas Garamond, a meeting that culminates in Mbo Abeso finding out more about his own identity and coming to terms with his interstitial existence between life and death.

Reading One's Identity

Mbo Abeso describes his experience, as a reader, prior to finding the copy of Ndongo's famous work in the hotel room, explaining: 'aparte del catecismo y de las consignas revolucionarias que tanto los devotos como los poderhabientes civiles usaron fusta para que entrase la letra' (2003: 86). The importance of Mbo Abeso's previous relationship with reading functions in this context as proof of the positive engagement between reader and text which is formed as a result of his reading of Ndongo's novel.

The significance of this story, its ability to involve the reader and, equally, the facility with which the reader engages with the novel, is evidence of the emphasis Djangany places on the reader-text relationship. Furthermore, it signals to the reader the importance of the written word and the function of textual engagement within the larger exercise of literary expression. The fictional characters in this story explore their own identities through situational interaction with other, pre-existing texts, and this message is reiterated when Judas Garamond explains: '[l]as palabras son el brazo invisible de la acción. Cuídelas con esmero' (2003: 105). The power of the written word to elicit change is directed to writers but the statement also illustrates the function of narrative. Mbo Abeso's search for his identity is resolved through reading; his life is shaped by the words written on the page.

The extent to which Mbo Abeso is familiar with his own identity does not extend past the contents of the novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, which he has read. His questions regarding his identity are based exclusively on his engagement with Ndongo's novel. The reader is told that Mbo Abeso 'nunca lograría llegar ni saber la mitad de quien es. Solamente se contentaría con que él fue el Primo Mbo, Mbo Abeso,

⁹⁸ It is ironic that the book was forgotten in 'el Hostal Recuerdos'. This could suggest that Djangany is commenting on the need to read what has already been written and not to forget the texts that have gone before. It has been noted that there is a lack of role models for contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors. Retaining what has been written is crucial for the maintenance of a literary history and all that such a history signifies for a given community.

soldadesca, renegado familiar de un subversivo que se fugó del país sin motivo' (2003: 74). These facets of his identity correspond to those given to him in Ndongu's novel. He knows nothing more about himself other than what he has read. This point is more dramatically highlighted during his discussion with Judas Garamond:

¿No se ha leído este libro? – señaló Judas el libro verde intitulado Los Poderes de la Tempestad.

– Sí, pero...hasta la página doscientos noventa y nueve. Luego me cansé de la lectura. Todavía no estoy muy acostumbrado a ella; fue mi primer libro ¿sabe?

– Ya le entiendo, ya le entiendo – dijo, moviendo ligeramente la cabeza Judas –. Pues justo en la página trescientos uno es donde le matan a usted. (2003: 95)

This situational interaction between the two fictional characters demonstrates that Mbo Abeso is only 'alive' because he has not read his own death, thus proving that his existence is inextricably linked to fiction. Lewis writes: '[t]o Garamond's question about his presence and identity, Abeso responds that he is alive and present.' (2007: 199). Towards the end of this initial conversation, Judas says: '– Si mis palabras no le convencen – cortó tajante Judas –, no tengo más remedio que darle a usted la oportunidad de saber quién es y hasta cuándo fue' (2003: 101). It is noteworthy that Judas has a more complete vision of Mbo Abeso's identity as he has read the entire novel. This fact illustrates that there are two identities connected with Mbo Abeso, the self-ascribed identity which is formed by his unfinished reading of the novel, and the identity ascribed to him by Judas who has read the entire book.

Each man is unaware of the identity ascribed to him in the respective novels in which they are also characters. It is only through their exchange that issues of identity are explored. In the same way that Mbo Abeso does not know if he is dead, Judas himself is unaware of his own identity. He describes to Mbo Abeso the situation of a young girl, Isabelita, at which point Mbo Abeso says: '– ¡Hum! – se exclamó el Primo Mbo –. Disculpe mi interrupción, pero la historia que me está contando es la de usted. La he leído en el libro' (2003: 98). There is a discrepancy between what Judas believes to be Isabelita's life and what Mbo Abeso has read. For the characters, their 'reality' is shaped by what they have read which further suggests that all identity is fiction. The interaction between these two characters draws attention to the way identity is expressed on a textual level, albeit through extreme examples of characters who effectively read themselves into existence. In response to Mbo Abeso's statement that Judas is relating a story that is not his own, he replies: 'Es más, con un poco de

esfuerzo me puedo leer todas las vidas que hay, incluida la mía' (2003: 99). From this statement, it is clear that Judas views all life as fiction.

The issues discussed in this section support the assertion that the act of reading constitutes a situational interaction between reader and text. This point is mirrored, and reinforced, through the metafictional creation of readers and authors within the short story. In this analysis, the interactions between reader and text, character and character, character and text, and author and character are rigorously compounded in order to blur the barrier between reality and fiction, substantiating the above-made statement that all identity is fiction. The readers, both implicit and explicit, accompany the protagonists on their search to discover more about their own identity.

The appropriated protagonists are only partially aware of their own identity, both self-ascribed and perceived. *Paratextual* information, in this case the dedication, can usefully focus the reader's attention on certain elements which may shape the interpretation of the text. The analysis of this short story has also demonstrated that the author appeals to both contemporary and future Equatorial Guinean authors to express identity within a historical context and not to omit details which are specific to the country. The intersection of fictional characters with fictional readers and authors generates an additional level of fiction for the actual reader. At the same time, he/she is playfully invited to engage with numerous allusions that draw upon previous knowledge of Equatorial Guinean novels and history.

In Djangany's texts, identity is expressed at a textual level through situational interactions, and his novels demonstrate that there are two main types of operating within them. Firstly, the interaction between fictional characters becomes fertile ground for the assertion of telescopic identity where facets are expressed according to the characters' needs. Secondly, the text becomes an artefact which enters into a situational dialogue with the reader. The engagement of the reader possesses heightened significance when the reader is a fictional character within the text. The metafictional and intertextual discourses that are characteristic of Djangany's narratives demonstrate the constructed nature of fiction and, by extension, identity. Through the literary analysis of Djangany's corpus, several sites of interest have been highlighted. The examination of situational interactions has revealed a deliberate anachrony in his texts as well as the encoding and layering of information. Both of these techniques solicit the active participation of the reader and serve as distinguishing features of his writing.

This chapter has argued that Djangany's texts contribute to the efforts of contemporary authors to approach this issue in individual ways while, at the same time, recognising that they have been influenced by previous generations of Equatorial Guinean writers. His particular approach has been revealed through the systematic examination of situational interactions in his texts. Djangany is an active member of his generation of authors who acknowledges the importance of the reader – text relationship and serves as an example for future generations of writers to follow.

CHAPTER FOUR

POWER AND IDENTITY IN MAXIMILIANO NKOGO ESONO

The two publications that are considered in this chapter are *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* (1994, 2000) and *Nambula* (2006).⁹⁹ Particular attention is given to situational interactions between the characters in order to illustrate the way identity is expressed. Nkogo Esono's narratives have been called 'nuevo costumbrismo nacional'.¹⁰⁰ His writing focuses primarily on daily realities. Following on from relevant background information, I will argue that power relations play a vital role in his approach to identity. Similarly, issues of subjectivity and perspective will be explored in the context of power and their subsequent impact on identity expression.

Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos has been published twice;¹⁰¹ the first version, in 1994, contained two stories: 'Adjá-Adjá y compañero en una jornada ordinaria' and 'Relato sobre un funcionario en un día de absentismo'. The second appeared six years later, in 2000, and was changed substantially to include three stories, only one of which had appeared in the earlier publication. His stories are vivid, detailed descriptions of daily life in Malabo and the behaviour of its inhabitants. Nkogo Esono humorously, though candidly, relates the inner workings of corruption and bribery that take place.

Three stories contained in the two publications will be analysed as they are best suited to illustrate the way Nkogo Esono expresses identity.¹⁰² The first is 'Adjá-Adjá y compañero en una jornada ordinaria' which acts as a bridge between the two publications because it is the only one to appear in both, although there are minor

⁹⁹ Currently living and writing in Malabo, Maximiliano Nkogo Esono was born in Nfulunkok-Yenkeng in the mainland district of Evinayong. He received his degree from the Universidad Complutense of Madrid and is a Professor of Literature at the Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial (Nistal Rosique, 2008: 118). In addition to teaching and writing, he attends international conferences which aim to bring together authors and scholars in the field, as well as to draw attention to the subject in both academic and public spheres. Along with other authors discussed in this dissertation, he actively participates in the dissemination of his own works.

¹⁰⁰ This designation is employed by Anacleto Oló Mibuy in the prologue to the 1994 collection of *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* and subsequently by Gloria Nistal Rosique (2008: 122).

¹⁰¹ I hesitate to call them two editions due to the significant changes in both content and form. I prefer to refer to them as two separate publications. In his section dedicated to *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*, Marvin Lewis summarises the differences between the 1994 and 2000 publications and offers detailed commentary of each story.

¹⁰² Of the two stories which will be excluded from this dissertation, one is the first version of 'Adjá-Adjá y compañero en una jornada ordinaria' and the other is 'Emigración'. The latter deals predominantly with issues of foreign aid and mass migration to Europe.

differences between the 1994 and the 2000 versions.¹⁰³ The second is the only story exclusively from the 2000 publication: 'Adjá-Adjá y compañero en un tres de agosto'. Finally, from the 1994 publication, 'Relato sobre un funcionario en un día de absentismo' will be examined. These short stories present a realistic account of everyday life in which individual identity is expressed through situational interactions.

Before analysing these three stories, I offer some contextual information based initially on the prologues that both publications carry. D. Anacleto Oló Mibuy wrote the prologue to the original collection of short stories. A professor and an anthropologist, he was, at the time of publication, a Cultural Consultant for President Obiang. The words he uses to describe the collection include 'sencillez, realista y polifónica', and he goes on to refer to 'picaresca nacional' and 'costumbrismo nacional' (1994: 6). These references shed some light on how Nkogo Esono's narrative has been perceived. An explanation of what he means by 'picaresca nacional' is given by Mibuy:

Cuando digo picaresca nacional, me refiero al *modus vivendi* al que están o pueden estar obligados muchos sectores de la sociedad, por devaluación criminal de su profesionalidad. Por otro lado, si el instinto picaresco está presente en todas las mentes, aquí en Adjá-Adjá la picardía es una obligación, una imposición; y si se quiere, un pecado leve, que se borra cada día con los momentos de remordimiento íntimo. (1994: 6)

He is not the only one who uses this terminology. Gloria Nistal Rosique, who was the Director of the Cultural Centre in Malabo for more than four years, writes:

Los cuentos son una representación paradigmática de la picaresca de las clases trabajadoras del país en su lucha para buscarse la vida a base de pequeños sobornos (adjá) y corruptelas. Una gran dosis de ironía teje todas las narraciones costumbristas que describen un Malabo de pillos de fresca sin igual. (2008: 118)

The word 'costumbrismo' is employed by two separate individuals, both of whom have experienced daily life in Malabo. The term is defined by Javier Herrero as: 'aquel género literario que se propone la descripción, no de un carácter o de unos caracteres individuales, sino de formas de vida colectiva, de ritos y hábitos sociales' (1978: 343). This definition is helpful as it also traces the relationship that an individual has with the

¹⁰³ In his prologue, these differences have been noted by Ndongo-Bidyogo as a possible area of future study. All references to this story have been taken from the 2000 publication.

collective. Nkogo Esono therefore presents situational interactions between specific characters which, in turn, serve as a social commentary on the larger population.¹⁰⁴

Ndongo-Bidyogo wrote the prologue to the 2000 publication. He began by drawing attention to the importance of literature in the construction of national culture but, more importantly, in the construction of identity (2000: 8). He points to the success of Nkogo Esono's works in translating the Equatorial Guinean reality into literature, affirming:

Nkogo retrata con habilidad y fidelidad la actual sociedad guineana, una sociedad en transición, y por eso se ha convertido en una Guinea de pícaros, en la que cada uno de sus trescientos mil habitantes mal censados se busca la vida como puede, puesto que no existe una manera regular, digamos que "digna", de sobrevivir. (2000: 9)

Nkogo Esono's characters make their living outside of the realm of 'acceptable' social conduct, they do what they must in order to survive. Ndongo-Bidyogo also signals to the reader that Nkogo Esono's work is rooted in a social reality:

Los presentes relatos de Maximiliano Nkogo tienen, pues, un doble mérito: por un lado, son el reflejo de una realidad tantas veces negada y, por eso mismo, hay que reconocer su valor moral, como testimonio de un tiempo difícil del que el guineano quiere emerger. Por otro, y desde el punto de vista del lenguaje, hay que reconocer que los personajes de Nkogo y las descripciones de Nkogo, reflejan fielmente el habla – y por tanto el pensamiento – del guineano actual. (2000: 9-10)

For this author, the systematic examination of situational interactions will reveal that they are significantly influenced by power relations. Before discussing the texts directly, it would be useful, firstly, to outline what is meant by power and power relations in this context.

The work of Michel Foucault is an essential point of reference.¹⁰⁵ For Foucault, power relations are 'rooted deep in the social nexus' (1994: 343). He continues: 'To live in society is, in any event, to live in such a way that some can act on the actions of others. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction' (1994: 343). Therefore, according to Foucault, power is an integral part of societal structure. This

¹⁰⁴ 'Costumbrismo' would be a promising avenue for future research. As a literary model, it would be interesting to investigate how Equatorial Guinean writers represent their society in this way. However, for reasons of scope and space, this issue will not be taken forward in this dissertation.

¹⁰⁵ In Chapter Two, I outlined the positionality of the main argument in relation to poststructuralism. Here, the reference to Foucault and his conception of self and agency does not coincide with the primary focus of the thesis. However, it has been signalled that symbolic interactionism has been criticised for its inattention to power relations. Including Foucault's definition of power is an attempt to reconcile this limitation of the social theorist approach.

fundamental connection permits further exploration of power relations within Nkogo Esono's fictional representation of Equatorial Guinean society. These power relations are relevant to the understanding of his expression of identity and, in particular, the situational interactions between characters. The concept of power is similar to identity in that it is resistant to classification and can be employed in diverse types of analyses.¹⁰⁶ It is relevant that the concept of power is tied to issues of identity in Nkogo Esono's works as the characters that exert power do so as an expression of their own identity. This intimate connection forms the basis of my analysis of these stories.

Foucault defines a relationship of power as: 'a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future' (1982: 789). Translated into fiction, the actions of characters who hold power over those who do not, shape the situational interactions that are the platform for the expression of identity. Foucault also suggests that power can exist at the level of the individual:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. (1982: 781)

Therefore, it is not only through interaction with others that power is exercised, but also through 'self-knowledge' or assertion of identity. A person's consciousness of his or her identity is a form of power which transforms them from individuals into subjects. This point materialises as Nkogo Esono's characters become aware of the facets of their identity which give them an advantage over the Other.

For his part, Bertrand Russell defines power as 'the production of intended effects' (1986: 19).¹⁰⁷ He goes on to classify the types of power over individuals: 'Power over human beings may be classified by the manner of influencing individuals, or by the type of organization involved' (1986: 19). The idea that power can be classified as influence over individuals relates back to the discussion of situational interactions and the concept of a telescopic identity in Chapter Two. Individuals can

¹⁰⁶ Rapport emphasises the 'polysemy' of the term (2007: 337).

¹⁰⁷ See also Rapport and Overing (2007: 338).

therefore choose to highlight facets of their identity which are most beneficial to them in particular circumstances. Rapport and Overing define power in general terms as 'known by its effects' and add that it 'involves distinctions and inequalities' (2007: 338). Consequently, the exercise of power or influence over others is instrumental in the individual obtaining the outcome he/she desires.

Russell's model of influence is based on a theory of group dynamics developed by Raven and French which is discussed in detail below. Russell's conception of the types of influence that can be exerted on an individual includes three categories:

An individual may be influenced: (a) by direct physical power over his body, e.g. when he is imprisoned or killed; (b) by rewards and punishments as inducements, e.g. in giving or withholding employment; (c) by influence on opinion, i.e. propaganda in its broadest sense. (1986: 19)

Russell's model takes into account the desired effect but does not consider the intentions of the one exerting power. In the case of situational interactions between individuals, quite often one person is dominated. Max Weber expands on this idea by introducing the concept of 'will'. He states: 'Domination in the quite general sense of power, ie, of the possibility of imposing one's own will upon the behavior of other persons [...].' (1986: 29). Influencing behaviour in this way will be useful for mapping the power relations which are represented in Nkogo Esono's texts.

So far it has been established that power relations can be understood as the influence of one person's will on another, with the intention of modifying behaviour. Alvin Goldman has described the central idea of power as '*getting what one wants*' (1986: 157 [italics in original]). He goes on further to suggest that merely influencing behaviour is not enough to constitute an exertion of power; it also relates to the welfare of the individual over whom power is exerted. For example, simply getting someone to comply with requests is not an exercise of power. However, if the welfare of the subordinate individual is compromised in order to attain a change in behaviour, then this would constitute an exercise of power (Goldman, 1986: 194). Consequently, the effects of power exerted on an individual must also be a consideration.

Since the idea of the 'welfare of an individual' is difficult to define, it is necessary to establish a framework of power within which situational interactions can be examined. French and Raven have worked extensively in the field of group dynamic theory and have classified what they call 'social power' into five categories. This model

is more detailed than Russell's conception as it identifies a wider variety of power relations within social interactions.

French and Raven describe five bases of power that are structured around the relationship between O and P where O is understood as a social influence represented by 'another person, a role, a norm, a group or a part of a group', and P is the person over whom power is exerted (1960: 608). They are:

- a) Reward power, based on P's perception that O has the ability to mediate rewards for him;
- b) Coercive power, based on P's perception that O has the ability to mediate punishments for him;
- c) Legitimate power, based on the perception by P that O has legitimate right to prescribe behavior for him;
- d) Referent power, based on P's identification with O;
- e) Expert power, based on the perception that O has some special knowledge or expertise. (1960: 612-13)

This model of power relations and social interaction will be employed below in order to classify the types of power which are exerted during the situational interactions between characters, and will be instrumental in determining which facets of identity are utilised to the benefit of the subject. In addition, this model clearly accounts for both parties involved in the exertion of power. Having established the close relationship between identity and power, it is now possible to conceive these ideas in a telescopic sense in order to integrate them into the discussion of identity. During situational interactions, the 'dominant' party can exert any one or several of the above types of power.

Referent power is a relationship whereby a person identifies with the influential party and is most relevant in this context. Raven and French define this as 'a feeling of oneness of P with O, or a desire for such an identity' (1960: 618). This type of power is applicable to the present texts as the majority of the characters who exert power have some relation to the dictatorial regime. Referent power is problematic to identify as it is sometimes closely linked to coercive or reward power. The complex relationship between O and P will be explored in detail in Nkogo Esono's texts, but the main point to underline here is the shared aims which must be present between O and P for referent power to exist. French and Raven state: 'P's identification with O can be established or maintained if P behaves, believes, and perceives as O does. Accordingly O has the ability to influence P, even though P may be unaware of this referent power' (1960:

618). Therefore, for a referent power relationship to exist, both O and P will have similar interests and motivations. *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos* and *Nambula* will now be analysed with these models in mind.

‘Adjá-Adjá y compañero una jornada ordinaria’

The two male protagonists of this story are ‘agentes del Orden Público’ (2000: 21). They are entrusted by the local commissary to keep the peace and ensure that the inhabitants of Malabo follow the rules of social conduct. Both men are married and have families. It is important to note that the first type of power which is perceptible in the story is the referent power between the men and the regime. Even the act of getting dressed in the morning is symbolic of this power. The uniform that the men wear is an outward sign of the power which distinguishes them from the general population. They are the eyes and ears of the regime on the streets and, consequently, referent power is exercised through their indirect relation to the President.

The first situational interaction in the story occurs between the pair and a merchant:

– ¡Tu identidad, amigo! – reclama Adjá-Adjá.

– ¿Mi idangtitat?, heee sí, sí, aquí hay.

El de la túnica blanca deja sobre la mesa el paquete que tenía en la mano, introduce una mano en el bolsillo, saca su documento de identidad personal y se lo entrega a los agentes. Estos lo leen y se sorprenden.

– ¿Es usted ecuatoguineano? – pregunta Adjá-Adjá arrugando la cara para mostrar aún más su extrañeza.

– Sí, sí, ya...nacionalisao yo – contesta el señor.

– ¿Desde cuándo llegaste aquí en Guinea Ecuatorial? – quiere, por su parte, saber el compañero de Adjá-Adjá.

– Cuatro...no, cinco años – contesta el hombre sin dejar de masticar su enorme mondadientes.

– Quita esto de la boca, hombre; estás hablando con autoridades – le ordena el compañero de Adjá-Adjá.

El comerciante sospecha que esto puede ir en serio y se quita el enorme palillo de la boca.

– ¿Realmente de dónde eres tú? – le pregunta Adjá-Adjá, que aún no le ha devuelto el documento.

– De “l’Afrique de l’Ouest”. (2000: 18-20)

The dialogue continues to reveal that the merchant does not have a permit to sell his goods in the national market. Adjá-Adjá and his partner threaten to take him to the station unless he gives them ‘algo’, thereby underlining the type of corruption

characteristic of daily transactions within the city. In this first example of situational interaction, the pair exercise power by asking to see the merchant's identity card, which every person is required to carry; it provides the pair with essential information. The use of the word 'idangtitat' as a short form to refer to this document is relevant to the merchant's response as it is here where we see, as represented phonetically, that he is not originally from Equatorial Guinea. The pair use this as an opportunity to question him further. The referent power they express, with their association to the regime and the possible threat of coercive power, causes the merchant to comply.

Power and Language

A further demonstration of power can be read in the language that is employed. When Adjá-Adjá addresses the merchant in the first line, he uses the familiar 'tú'. When he reads that the merchant's document indicates that he is Equatorial Guinean, he quickly changes to the formal 'usted' form. Shortly after, it becomes apparent that the merchant is not Equatorial Guinean and the address reverts back to the familiar 'tú'. This change in tone reflects the power exerted by Adjá-Adjá during this interaction. The use of 'usted' indicates a form of respect or, at the very least, demonstrates that Adjá-Adjá is treating the merchant as a fellow countryman. The 'tú' form represents a linguistic subordination of the merchant and subsequently allows for Adjá-Adjá to maintain full control over him during this exchange. Also, the request that the merchant give the pair 'algo' to avoid being taken to the station creates the illusion that they are offering reward power. The merchant is happy to comply as he will not be arrested when, in fact, the pair have manipulated the situation from the beginning, exerting their power in a way that will ensure that the outcome is beneficial to them.

Situational Interaction and Reward

Throughout the day, there are several examples of the pair utilising their power in order to gain some sort of reward, either large or small. They demonstrate habitual behaviour when it begins to rain, and they lie to gain access to the cinema. This act is not solely an exercise of power, but is also one of necessity:

Ellos deberían pagar pero no pagan, a lo mejor porque no tienen. Cuando alguien intenta impedirles entrar o exigirles que presenten el billete de entrada, suelen enfadarse mucho con esa persona y suelen citarle una serie de artículos de unas leyes que sólo

conocen ellos mismos, artículos que, según suelen decir entre rabia y amenazas, les faculta entrar gratis en esos sitios. Entonces para evitar cualquier problema, quienes ya les conocen les dejan entrar gratis y salir cuando quieren. (2000: 35)

The fact that the men do not have the money to pay for the tickets is a partial motivation for the exertion of power. It is also significant that those who know them do not deny them access. The men have conditioned a response from those placed in a subordinate role. This phenomenon is explored by Raven and French who maintain that there is an 'internalization of social norms' which causes a 'decreasing degree of dependence of behavior on an external O and increasing dependence on an internal value' (1960: 612). Therefore, others react without power being exerted by the pair based on their previous experience. Similar to a Pavlovian response, the subjects are conditioned to the exertion of power and, consequently, there is no need for it to be demonstrated during each interaction.

Later in the day, the pair stop a twenty-two-year old with a pushcart full of supplies:

- Yo no tengo documentación, mi edentitat se ha perdido – dice él, algo asustado.
- Ya me lo suponía – comenta Adjá-Adjá.
- ¿Y dónde tienes los papeles del pus-pús? – le pregunta el policía.
- Este pus-pús no es mío; trabajo para un señor y me han mandado que vaya a dejar estas cosas a casa de una señora – explica el joven.

Adjá-Adjá y Compañero creen que ésta es una ocasión propicia que no pueden desaprovechar. Le aplican una retahíla de artículos de leyes de la policía, de ordenanzas militares y órdenes ministeriales, y el joven se queda atontado, más nervioso y atemorizado. Y como Adjá-Adjá y Compañero saben que esta técnica siempre surte efecto, le dicen que si no quiere que le confisquen el pus-pús y todo su contenido y que lo lleven a él mismo a la cárcel por no tener documentación, pues que unte el carro, que les dé algo. (2000: 38)

They persuade the young man to give them all of his money and a case of alcohol to avoid going to prison. The reader is then told that as a consequence, the boy will get 'treinta o cincuenta palos en la planta de los pies' (2000: 39). The pair have used their position to exploit the young man under the threat of coercive power. Similar to the scene with the merchant, the pair exercise reward power when they manipulate the situation so that the young man feels as though he is gaining something (i.e. not going to prison) when, in fact, he has not done anything wrong.

Shortly after this interaction, the reader is told that: 'No pretenden más. No quieren construir rascacielos ni pretenden quitarle a nadie su puesto. Lo único que necesitan es comer al día, lo suficiente, con sus respectivas familias' (2000: 39). This

quote appears as justification for the exertion of power which has transpired, seemingly to evoke sympathy in the reader. These demonstrations of power are directly related to how Nkogo Esono expresses identity in his narratives. The author carefully depicts daily social interaction and emphasises survival. The way the protagonists highlight facets of their identity in order to gain rewards demonstrates that the expression of identity is tailored to each situation. In addition to providing the reader with a commentary on the imbalance of power within the country, the author also draws attention to the exploitation of identity for individual gain.

Survival and Remorse

At the end of the story, the reader is informed that the pair feel guilty for their actions:

[P]rofundamente sienten remordimientos por todo lo que han dicho y hecho hoy al margen de lo establecido por la ley [...]. Pero de todos modos, los dos agentes creen que tenían que hacerlo, tenían que actuar como han actuado, pues, por lo menos, han tomado algunas copas hoy y sus mujeres y los niños picarán algo esta tarde. Mañana será otro día, ordinario o no, pero nadie puede adivinar cómo se lo pasarán: el futuro es siempre incierto, al menos para los humanos. (2000: 40)

Through exercising the power gained by their association with the regime, the men have a minor advantage, at least for the day. The facets of their identity which they express allow them to exert power in order to get what they want and what is needed to survive. Their actions are focused on the immediate present and, each day, they start again from the beginning. The cyclical nature of this process relates to identity expression as it is reinvented on a daily basis depending on the individual's circumstances.

In spite of the remorse they feel, the author signals that their actions were necessary. The use of 'los humanos' implies that uncertainty about the future is an integral part of the human condition. Consequently, like the expression of identity, each day holds multiple possibilities. Fulfilling basic needs as they arise corresponds to the way Nkogo Esono has expressed identity. His fictional representation of life in Malabo requires adaptability and a willingness to live in the present with little or no view towards the future.

‘Adjá-Adjá y compañero en un tres de agosto’

This story takes place in the city of Bata on the mainland of Equatorial Guinea. The geographic location provides a contrast to the previous story while, at the same time, it suggests that these types of interactions permeate the entire country. The pair represent ‘el guineano’ or the average man. The reader is informed that: ‘Uno es de la Región Continental y otro de la Insular. Nunca han salido del país, ni siquiera por motivos personales’ (2000: 47). The idea that the pair embody a collective truth suggests that average Equatorial Guineans will make use of situational interactions by employing the facets of their identity which would be most beneficial at certain times. In most cases, these individuals possess some type of referent power. However, it will become clear that sometimes it is the lack of power during these interactions that yields the best results for the individual.

Physical Identity

The physical descriptions of the characters are related to the likelihood of their ability to exert power over others. Nkogo Esono writes: ‘Ninguno de ambos es gordo, pero tampoco les importaría engordar si se presentara la ocasión [...] se interpreta como signo de buena vida, al menos en el pensar de mucha gente’ (2000: 46).¹⁰⁸ The ‘buena vida’ is attained through the exertion of power over others. The preoccupation with weight is an outward sign of the level of power one has attained. It is significant that neither of the men is heavy as it demonstrates that, although they are able to gain an advantage over some, it is not enough to provide them with the ‘buena vida’. It also clarifies their position with regard to referent power. The closer they are to the source of the referent power, in this case the President, the more likely it is that they are heavy. In this case, their physical size exposes what limited power they actually have at their disposal. For example: ‘Hermes ha engordado, ¿eh? – observa Adjá-Adjá. – Como era de esperar, ¿acaso no es primo del presi? – dice su Compañero’ (2000: 72).¹⁰⁹ If we bear in mind that the men represent ‘el guineano’, it suggests that the general population is not enjoying the ‘buena vida’ and must survive by whatever means necessary.

¹⁰⁸ The figure of the heavy man also appears in Djangany’s *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* in the protagonist’s dreams.

¹⁰⁹ The nepotistic transferral of power is a topic which will be discussed in relation to the novel *Nabmula*.

Aside from the men's physical identity, the reader is also told about their linguistic ability which, again, can be extended to the collective:

De cultura general aceptable, hablan fang, pichi, bisió, etcétera, sin mencionar el castellano, que es la lengua oficial y en la que, por desgracia o por fortuna, no se expresan tan defectuosamente como muchos, y están derrochando grandes esfuerzos por aprender el francés [...]. (2000: 47)

The linguistic abilities of the population underline the diversity of the languages in use while highlighting the position of Spanish within that spectrum. The use of 'fortunately or unfortunately' for their Spanish skills suggests that there are mixed feelings towards its status as the dominant language of expression. Here, Nkogo Esono is not presenting a judgement in favour or against the level of linguistic ability in Spanish but he simply illustrates that it is a contentious issue. The tension between languages reflects political conceptions of 'official' languages that do not always coincide with reality. Language is often a signifier of identity and, in this context, linguistic variation is presented as a facet of the pair's identity that comes to the fore during situational interactions.¹¹⁰

The Individual and the Collective

It is in this story that the reader is informed of the origin of the protagonist's name, Adjá-Adjá, which he was given when he was in the Military Academy after devouring four pieces of bread and two cans of sardines that belonged to an official. Since then, he has been called 'Adjá-Adjá' which means 'migaja-migaja' (2000: 48). If these men represent 'el guineano', then the name refers to the lack of food and to the desperation of a population living in hunger. In addition, the food is symbolic as it is what would have typically been consumed by Spanish colonialists and 'emancipados'. The pair represents the paradoxical nature of life in Equatorial Guinea. Even though they exercise power over others, they still have to struggle to survive. The underlying poverty of the population gives rise to the *picaresque* behaviour of the pair and illustrates the prevalence of corruption as means of getting ahead.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ The issue of language is worthy of more attention than can be offered in this dissertation. Equatorial Guineans do possess wide-ranging linguistic abilities and it would be interesting to investigate their interaction and expression in future research. In addition, the role of the Spanish Cultural Centres in disseminating language as well as their role in publication in Spanish is a contentious issue. Bolekia Boleká has written extensively on indigenous languages being integrated into the education system and actively encourages writers to publish in their native language.

¹¹¹ See also Jorge Berástegui Wood (2008).

Accordingly, economic struggle is a factor that shapes Nkogo Esono's situational interactions. The following dialogue between Adjá-Adjá and *compañero* illustrates the collective outlook towards the discovery of oil in Equatorial Guinea:

- Esta vida es un poco complicada – comenta su Compañero en voz alta.
- Todos deberíamos darnos cuenta de ello – dice Adjá-Adjá, pero a pesar de todo creo que hay que tener esperanza, siempre.
- ¿Tú crees que todo seguirá igual para nosotros cuando se empiece a explotar nuestro petróleo?
- No tengo ni idea; sólo pienso que aquí, por esperar, se puede esperar de todo. (2000: 71)

This interaction is the first time where a discussion of the future takes place. Prior to this scene, the pair has been focused on daily survival and the present situation. The expression of optimism is significant as it is mixed with doubt. This outlook can be extended to represent the attitude of the population who maintain hope in spite of the uncertainty related to the political and economic future of the country. Societal instability forces them to live a daily reality in which the assertion of facets of their identity changes regularly. The preoccupation with the immediate present and survival does not allow for profound reflection on one's identity. However, it does emphasise the situational nature of the expression of that identity and reflects the tendency towards corruption.

‘Relato sobre un funcionario en un día de absentismo’

The protagonist in this short story contrasts with Adjá-Adjá and *compañero*. Unlike the opportunistic pair, Claudio is not in a position of referent power which allows him to subsidise his wages. He is employed as a Civil Servant but he cannot survive on his official earnings. He makes the difficult decision to take a day off work with the hope of making more money than he would if had gone into the office.

The Paradox of Survival

The narrator explains that this piece of short fiction is a representation of a reality that exists in Equatorial Guinea. He also draws attention to the contradictory nature of Claudio's situation:

La literatura suele ser el termómetro que mide los altibajos espacio-temporales de un determinado grupo social. El relato sobre un funcionario en un día de absentismo, no es nada más que la transfiguración caricaturizada de una realidad, compañera incómoda de estos tiempos difíciles. Claudio, protagonista principal de este relato es la síntesis de un conflicto permanente entre la conciencia del deber público y los escasísimos estímulos institucionales de cumplir con ese dolor [sic]. (1994: 25)

Claudio's circumstances are further complicated by the fact that he is also supporting a wife and young family. His financial obligations are what ultimately push him to pursue alternative ways to make money.

The emphasis on his linguistic abilities serves two functions. First, it signals that he is an individual who possesses valuable skills, which makes his financial situation even more difficult to comprehend as these abilities are not rewarded. Secondly, it underlines the broader linguistic situation in the country as a whole. Nkogo Esono writes:

De cultura general aceptable, se expresa en más de dos lenguas autóctonas, y, a su edad, derrocha grandes esfuerzos aprendiendo el francés, por cuanto se comenta entre otras cosas que viene a ser la segunda lengua de trabajo, junto al español, que limpia, fija y da esplendor, idioma que ha sido, es y por supuesto seguirá siendo oficial, a rajatabla, hasta la eternidad, por irrevocables razones histórico-culturales, por la Hispanidad. (1994: 27)

The ironic significance attached to the role of Spanish within the larger social context is couched in Claudio's individual linguistic identity which, in turn, can be extended to the larger population. Marvin Lewis comments on this passage:

By characterizing Claudio in such a positive manner, the author leads the reader to question why Claudio cannot be successful and why he has such a miserable existence. This ironic juxtaposition of expectations and reality calls into question the efficacy of the political and economic situation of Equatorial Guinea. (2007: 68)

As Lewis rightly points out, Claudio's individual situation is symptomatic of the larger national imbalance which is being signalled by the author. Claudio's identity is rooted in this national reality and his inability to succeed is a result of being on the disadvantaged side of the imbalance of power.

Powerlessness and Identity

In terms of power relations, it has already been stated that Claudio does not exert power over others in order to benefit himself. Instead, he is placed in the position of

subordination to those who have power. During a situational interaction with his friend Paco, he allows power to be exerted over him in order to get what little financial assistance he can. The economic imbalance alone exemplifies this interaction as Paco occupies a socially superior position which allows him to exert reward power over Claudio. On his day away from the office, Claudio hopes to make 500 francos *cefas*. However, breakfast alone costs Paco 2000. In the end, Claudio asks his friend for help and he gives him 1000. Nkogo Esono writes: ‘Paco, simpático y generoso por naturaleza, lamenta profundamente la situación de su amigo, quien además de ser funcionario, se ve sin embargo en la necesidad de “ir pidiendo limosna”’ (1994: 36). During this situational interaction, both men are described in terms of their financial status. It is this measure of economic power that creates the social imbalance while, at the same time, illustrating the stark contrast between Claudio and the other protagonists.

With money in his pocket, Claudio makes his way to the market. This urban space is symbolic in Nkogo Esono’s writing as it represents the heart of the city and contains a veritable cross section of society. The scene in the market demonstrates that everyday life and the fight for survival are firmly anchored in the present. In the same way that Claudio is attempting to make money away from work, so too are the actions of others focused on their immediate reality. He buys some rice and the reader is told:

Lo compra por trescientos, se lo envuelven y se lo entregan en uno de esos papeles que se ven desparramados por doquier y que parecen documentos oficiales que deberían estar en los archivos, sobre todo para la utilidad de los historiadores e investigadores del futuro. (1994: 39)

The allusion to documents that should be preserved in archives is employed symbolically to indicate a more direct need. In this example, there is little concern for the future and survival is more powerful than the need for self-actualisation. By pointing out that these important documents are destroyed, the author highlights the incongruity which exists between expectation and reality.

Claudio’s day of absenteeism did bring him temporary financial relief. However, this money was not attained through skill, hard work or validation of his identity in any way. He was able to feed his family because of the generosity of an old friend, coupled with his acceptance of his powerlessness. Claudio’s experience corresponds to that of the larger population. The narrator states:

Está pensando en la escabrosa situación a la que está arrojado con toda su familia. Otras numerosas familias se ahogan también en el mismo mar de miseria. “Es una crisis que azota a todo el mundo”, se ha dicho con o sin acierto. Con todo, el alivio común es la esperanza, esta esperanza que todos tienen en lo que ahora se habla de la democracia, una democracia que, teniendo [sic] en cuenta “la dignidad de la persona” traerá la protección social a los ciudadanos frente a las enfermedades, al paro, al chabolismo... en definitiva, a las injusticias. (1994: 46)

The experience of the collective is bound to the experience both of being subjugated within imbalanced power relations and maintenance of hope for the future. Claudio is one man who represents a shared reality. Individuals engage in situational interactions which are shaped by power relations. At both ends of the spectrum, the established power relations are a determinant force in the expression of individual and collective identity. Because of the immediate need for survival, the expression of identity operates telescopically according to these power relations. Although an individual may not be able to change his/her situation, within the broader social structure, he/she continues to exercise a certain amount of agency in terms of which aspects of the self they demonstrate during situational interactions. Through the presentation of individuals and their daily reality, Nkogo Esono demonstrates that the exertion of power can define the type of interaction that takes place and is taken into account by the individual during the interaction.

Nambula

This novel, published in 2006, had enormous success in Malabo.¹¹² Nambula is the name of a fictitious country not unlike Equatorial Guinea. The novel contains serious social commentary and is extremely critical of the country’s corrupt political system. Although this story does not openly refer to the Equatorial Guinean reality, the text easily lends itself to an interpretation of present-day society there.

Indeed, in this novel, the author exemplifies the importance of power relations and their impact on identity expression. In Nkogo Esono’s work, the function of power is illustrated within the fictional political framework of Nambula and the reader is presented with several situational interactions which demonstrate critically how power functions within the society. Nistal Rosique writes:

¹¹² His novel won the national literature competition in October 2006, the award was presented by the Centro Cultural Español de Malabo. Following the presentation of his book, the author spent over an hour autographing copies (Nistal Rosique, 2008: 120).

Nambula es una descripción brutal, disfrazada de relato desenfadado e inocente, de la corrupción salvaje que azota a muchas ex colonias africanas y que afecta a todos los ámbitos de la sociedad. (2008: 120)

While the fictitious country of Nambula may be emblematic of many ex-colonies in Africa, there is evidence in the text which allows the reader to identify it. What is interesting about this novel is not that Equatorial Guinea is mildly disguised as one of many countries in Africa, but that, in spite of its highly critical content, the novel was celebrated by the country's inhabitants. It is an example of what Djangany signalled in his prologue to *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* regarding censorship. The administration cannot censure what they do not read.

Fact or fiction

The reader's ability to establish connections and to link these basic geographical details to actual locations can be the first indication that the story is in fact referring to a contemporary situation in Equatorial Guinea. The narrator describes Nambula further:

Nambula es un pequeño país del África negra, una ex colonia de varias potencias europeas, enclavada entre elevadas montañas, ríos caudalosos y árboles robustos y fornidos, convertida hoy en un mundo tan complejo y fascinante, que parece levitar entre la magia de los discursos y la incesante esperanza en un porvenir de prosperidad horizontal. (2006: 5)

Nambula is defined not only in geographical terms but also by the collective hope for the future. The reader is also informed that the people of Nambula are proud of their identity as a free and modern state (2006: 6). However, the affirmation of their identity is not only centred on their political status, but also on certain personality traits:

Por otra parte, el estómago y los intestinos de muchos de los aglomerados también reclaman ya lo suyo con bastante estruendo. Pero todos tienen que aguantar y portarse como si no pasara nada. Se ha dicho – quizá con acierto – que la paciencia, y no el conformismo, es una de las señas de identidad de los nambulanos. (2006: 8)

The fictional representation of Equatorial Guinea allows the author a critical perspective on current socio-political circumstances. It is noteworthy that Nambula is described as 'una comunidad de individuos' (2006: 19), which suggests that there is no cohesive national identity and, indeed, that identity is understood on the basis of the individual rather than the collective. In this sense, Nambula as a country or model

becomes fertile ground for the expression of identity and discussion surrounding issues that are 'common' to similar African states.

It has been argued that the author's use of situational interactions as a site of identity expression is shaped by power relations both at the individual and social level as a product of interaction. This argument is taken further in this novel as the situational interactions hinge on the power relations that operate within Nambula as a whole, especially at a political level. The issues expressed in this novel from a political viewpoint are complementary to the analyses of his short stories that were written from a proletariat perspective.

Nepotism and Power

The protagonist, known only as 'el sobrino', is the nephew of Jim Jimbo who is the second in charge of the government. Through the referent power of the uncle, the nephew is assigned a position of authority. The following extract reveals how this type of nepotism operates within Nambula:

He pensado en que se le dé un cargo para demostrar a esos blancos que cuando humillan a los negros en sus países deben tener mucho cuidado, porque las cosas pueden cambiar. ¿Qué os parece mi propuesta?

– Me parece muy bien, jefe. Si usted dice que se merece un cargo yo también digo que se lo merece – ha dicho uno.

– Yo también estoy de acuerdo, jefe. Él ha sufrido mucho y es justo que se le dé un buen cargo – ha opinado otro.

– Yo también lo apoyo, jefe. Ha estado en Europa trabajando por este país; no tenían derecho a tratarle tan mal, entonces veo que una vez vuelto se le debe reparar el daño que le han causado.

– Yo también estoy de acuerdo, hermano.

– Yo también, jefe.

– Yo también.

– Yo también.

Todos han apoyado la idea de su jefe, o porque en realidad ven el asunto como él, o simplemente porque no ven la necesidad de desaprobare su razón; además, saben por experiencia que en este tipo de situaciones no vale la pena llevar la contraria, por más que se quiera.

– Muy bien – se ha congratulado Jim Jimbo –, veo que todo el mundo está de acuerdo. Os he consultado a todos y habéis expresado libremente vuestras opiniones, que coinciden; pero luego nuestros enemigos traerán el cuento de que aquí no se practica la democracia y que no hay respeto a las libertades individuales. (2006: 14)

This scene demonstrates quite ironically how 'democracy' functions in Nambula. The men agree because, in most cases, it is easier than voicing an objection, thereby

significantly revealing that Jim Jimbo exerts referent power over them. Furthermore, there is reference to an act of xenophobia experienced by ‘el sobrino’ when he was working in Europe. The position he receives is seen as compensation for having been victimised.

The second half of the discussion regarding his appointment shows the deliberation process. It is here that the true nature of the government is revealed:

- ¿Qué os parece si le nombramos ministro de Finanzas? – les ha propuesto.
 - Estaría bien, jefe, pero dónde se metería al cuñado de...
 - ¡Ah, sí! Es verdad. Fijaos que no me había dado cuenta.
- Has hecho una buena observación; su hermana se hubiera rebelado y...todo un caos.
- Han seguido barajando posibilidades y no han encontrado ningún puesto adecuado libre. Todos los que han sido sugeridos estaban ocupados por cuñados, suegros, hermanos, primos, amigos íntimos, hasta que al tío se le ha ocurrido consultar con su sobrino, para ver si él mismo tenía alguna cosa pensada.
- Bueno, en realidad, tío, no me gustaría que alguien perdiera su trabajo por mí. ¿No se me podría crear algo que..., en fin, que sea nuevo y exclusivamente para mí? Por ejemplo, inspeccionar... (2006: 15)

This exchange depicts how ‘el sobrino’ is given the post as General Supervisor. The fact that a position needs to be created for him reveals that all of the established positions in the government are occupied by members of family and close friends. In this example, Jim Jimbo displays referent power through his close association with the President and he, in turn, exerts reward power over ‘el sobrino’ by offering him a governmental post. This fictional account is reminiscent of the real political situation in Equatorial Guinea, where the current imbalance of political power can be viewed in nepotistic terms: the government is run by individuals with close ethnic ties to the President, and posts are arbitrarily assigned to those who will be sympathetic to the regime.¹¹³

‘El sobrino’ is now in a position of authority and he does not miss an opportunity to exert his newly found referent power which he has inherited through nepotistic means. One of his duties as General Supervisor is to issue licences, especially for new businesses, which places him in an optimal position to receive bribes. It is clear that the businessmen see ‘el sobrino’ as having legitimate power to give them the permits they need. By offering him bribes, they can exert reward power over him in

¹¹³ ‘Para asegurarse el control del poder, Obiang Nguema instaló a su horizontal familia en el poder y siguió gobernando el país como si de un asunto familiar se tratase’ (Bolekia Boleká, 2003: 141).

order to attain their desired outcome. This process is highlighted in the following passage:

- Eminencia, sabemos que en todas las partes las licencias cuestan lo suyo, y pagaremos las tasas que correspondan, pero no por eso no se puede tomar una cervecita
- dice el que ha abierto el maletín entregándolo el fajo. (2006: 25)

This scene demonstrates the corruption of the government officials and is comparable to the types of interactions that have already been examined in *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*. Nistal Rosique writes:

El sobrino, como es llamado siempre en el libro, se encargará de ejercer a gran escala [...] el oficio que practicaran con humildad Adjá-Adjá y su compañero, y de beneficiar a los allegados haciendo gala de la solidaridad familiar africana [...]. (2008: 121)

The power relations which are evident during the situational interactions in both narratives are further proof of the way Nkogo Esono expresses the identity of his characters.

It is not only in the boardroom that these questionable exchanges take place. ‘El sobrino’ is involved in similar situational interactions that raise central key questions. During a conversation with his friend Abou, the idea of education emerges:

- Bueno, no sé, acabaste la carrera, ¿no? – pregunta Abou.
- ¡Qué va!... Pero, como sabes, encontré trabajo, me puse a trabajar y creo que esto es lo más importante. Porque con o sin carrera, al final uno tiene que trabajar y ganar dinero.
- Tienes razón.
- Hombre, no ha cambiado mucho mi forma de pensar. Somos nambulanos y nuestra condición de negros nos obliga a ser más prácticos. La Universidad, los títulos..., al final lo que manda es el dinero. Por eso creo que uno debe aprovechar al máximo las oportunidades de dinero que se le presenten.
- Tienes razón, pero también es verdad que la Universidad le ayuda a uno a entender la vida y que...
- ¡Bah!, ¿y para qué me sirve a mí entender la vida? Además, la vida no se puede entender; sólo hay que vivirla, disfrutarla y punto. (2006: 28)

This interaction is significant as it represents both sides of the argument while, at the same time, giving the reader a clear picture of where ‘el sobrino’ stands when it comes to education. The fact is that, although he is working and earning money, he has not acquired the post on his own merit. The conversation further underlines the situational and opportunistic elements which underpin all of his actions. Similar to the outlook presented in *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*, ‘el sobrino’ acts in the present, the here and

now, whereas Abou symbolises a more sustainable viewpoint that is focused on the future. In the context of situational interaction, these divergent points signal that Nkogo Esono's expression of identity is firmly anchored in the immediate present.

Abuse and Corruption

'El sobrino' represents the types of individuals who occupy posts within the government. Given the nepotistic way in which these posts are assigned, rarely are these members of government faced with resistance. There is an interesting contrast when he is first confronted with a member of the political Opposition. The reader is told that it is during the time of elections: 'Nambula va hacia la democracia y cada partido debe expresarse libremente y presentar su programa sin que esto conlleve, como antes, persecuciones y detenciones' (2006: 35). Although this order has come straight from the President himself, 'el sobrino' does not believe that the Opposition has the right to speak in public. In an opinionated address which continues for almost ten pages, the Leader of the Opposition makes several observations regarding Nambula's political situation. These pages can be read as a social critique; however, what is important for the purpose of this analysis is the reaction it elicits from 'el sobrino'. The following example shows how the author presents this interaction:

– Pero así no podemos avanzar, porque todo está al revés; sin embargo conviene ponerlo al derecho, y como opositores en esto estamos.

Aplausos.

(“Pero si tú no puedes matar ni una mosca; además este país no está al revés, lo único que está al revés es tu atrevimiento”, observa el sobrino para sus adentros desde la ventana de su despacho.) (2006: 36-37)

The Opposition Leader's remarks are counterbalanced by the sobrino's interior monologue. Secondly, it is significant that 'el sobrino' responds in this way as it obviously goes against the 'official' party line that has been established by the President. This defiance distances 'el sobrino' from the source of his referent power, an act that will ultimately lead to his dismissal.

Following the address, 'el sobrino' and his men pursue the Opposition Leader. The reader is told that he has spent a significant amount of time in Europe (2006: 44). From the point of view of 'el sobrino', this is seen negatively as he has been away from his country for a long time and has now returned to petition for political change. The Opposition Leader is seen as a threat, as he has studied abroad and has come back only

to find that he is not accepted by his countrymen and, more specifically, by members of the dominant political party. This character stands for many expatriates who returned to Equatorial Guinea following the change in regime and who were hopeful for the future. The international factors that have shaped this character's identity are responsible for his marginalised position in this context and are revealed during the situational interaction.

When 'el sobrino' and his men finally detain the Leader of the Opposition, they exert coercive power over him in an attempt to get him to confess to planning a coup d'état:

- ¿Quiénes son estos? – desea saber el interrogador.
- Son... mis... amigos—contesta entrecortadamente.
- ¿Dónde están?
- En... Europa y... América.
- ¿Con ellos vas a gobernar el país? ¿No?... Bueno, pasa, pasa al archivo siguiente.
- ¿Y esto? ¿Qué son estos planos?
- No son... planos... son... gráficos y... dia... gramas.
- No me tomes por un cretino, amigo; éstos son planos, y me parece que son planos de lugares estratégicos de esta ciudad; lo único que me tienes de decir ahora es por qué los tienes en tu ordenador, quién te los ha dado y con qué finalidad [...].
- Lo siento, hermanos, no.... conspiramos contra... nadie. Si me... queréis matar... matadme... de una vez, pero no me hagan tanto... daño... Somos un partido... demócrata... porque creemos en... los valores... de la democracia... creemos... que la democracia... es el único... sistema... que puede salvar a los pueblos... a nuestro pueblo... de la esclavitud... del empobrecimiento... y... y de la ignorancia... Aunque me maten... siempre... estaré. (2006: 48)

In response to the threat of coercive power, the Opposition Leader voices his opinions. This exchange between the two men demonstrates the opposing political views within Nambula and, even though the President has granted them permission to speak in public, he is nevertheless threatened by 'el sobrino', a loyal member of the dominant party. 'El sobrino' reacts violently, suggesting that political views opposite to those of the administration are not permitted. The power that 'el sobrino' exerts over the Opposition Leader results in his death, which is officially recorded as suicide.¹¹⁴ This example of coercive power underlines a serious problem with regard to identification. Allegiance to the single party system is presented as mandatory and, as such, freedom

¹¹⁴ This scene bears a striking resemblance to a well-documented incident which occurred shortly after independence in March 1968. Anastasio Ndongo was accused of being the instigator of a conspiracy to overthrow the President. He died falling out of a window and the official report states that it was a result of suicide. Ndongo-Bidyogo refutes the official account of this incident saying that 'no coincide con la realidad' (1977: 160).

of personal expression is not tolerated. Individual identity is discouraged in favour of a shared (imposed) sense of socio-political homogeneity.

At first, this issue appears to presents a visible limitation to the expression of identity as a result of situational interaction. Despite being unable to alter his fate, the Opposition Leader does express the facets of his identity that are most beneficial to him in his situation. Taking his probable death into account, the words ‘siempre estaré’ illustrate that he is in control of expressing his identity. The telescopic expression of his identity is tailored to the situation and heavily influenced by the power structure but is controlled by the subject nonetheless. Equally, ‘el sobrino’ utilises his expression of identity to serve his interests and exerts influence during the interaction.

Unlike Adjá-Adjá and *compañero*, ‘el sobrino’ not only threatens coercive power, but also exerts it. His referent power from the President and the position he occupies, which hinges on nepotistic relations with the second in command, are demonstrated during an interaction with a detainee:

- Tú, dime, ¿por qué estás aquí?
- No lo sé, señor – responde el hombre, hecho un palo y con una cara empapada en sudor.
- No digas *señor*, llámale *excelencia* cada vez que respondas – le corrige el cabo, y rectifica el preso:
- No lo sé, excelencia.
- Esta respuesta trae a los labios del sobrino una sonrisa entre irónica y graciosa.
- Con que no lo sabes, ¿eh?; me quieres decir que te detuvieron sin motivos y que estás aquí injustamente, ¿no?
- No, excelencia; quiero decir que no me informaron de los motivos de mi detención y encarcelamiento [...].
- ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas aquí? –le pregunta el sobrino.
- Cuatro días, excelencia.
- ¿Quiénes te detuvieron?
- Unos policías, excelencia [...].
- ¿Tienes algún problema con esos policías?
- No, excelencia; nunca les había visto en mi vida. Soy un hombre de paz, nunca busco...
- ¿Ya habías ido antes a la cárcel?
- Nunca, excelencia [...].
- ¿Tienes el carnet del partido?
- Sí, excelencia, aquí lo tengo – lo saca del bolsillo –, siempre lo llevo encima [...].
- Muy bien – sentencia devolviéndole el documento –, creo que estás aquí por un error de los agentes. A partir de ahora puedes irte a casa, estás libre. (2006: 89-90)

This interaction is relevant to the understanding of how power and identity are presented telescopically in the text. As soon as ‘el sobrino’ learns that the detainee has

a political membership card, he is set free. The arbitrary nature of arrests, coupled with the power of allegiance to the single party system, demonstrate the extent to which civilians are manipulated and subjected to ‘temporary’ exertions of coercive power.

If a person cannot prove allegiance to the political party or is excluded from the circle of power, then he/she is subjected to cruel treatment that violates human rights. The attitude of ‘el sobrino’ towards prisoners appears to mirror that of the regime. When a guard expresses concern about a prisoner’s health, ‘el sobrino’ quotes from the Prison Ordinances: “‘El preso no tiene derecho ni a la comodidad ni a la asistencia sanitaria’” – recita el cabo. A partir del grado de cabo, las ordenanzas penitenciarias se tienen que conocer como uno y uno son dos’ (2006: 94-95). These words are not his own, but rather a series of explicit guidelines on how to treat prisoners. It is clear that the established system for the detainment and punishment of civilians is based on the exertion of coercive power. Individuals consistently live in fear of this system and therefore the ability to instantly highlight or downplay facets of their identities becomes, in some cases, a matter of life or death.

Nistal Rosique observes that the President is one of the only characters to be painted in a positive light (2008: 121). He is presented as well-informed and fair when ‘el sobrino’ is called to see him and the President explains that there have been many complaints about his behaviour. All of the blame for the abuses of power is attributed to ‘el sobrino’ and the President relieves him of his duties. It is interesting that ‘el sobrino’ is seen as a product of his environment yet the President of the regime is opposed to his exertion of coercive power. In the end, ‘el sobrino’ is punished for his actions, which makes a strong statement about the need for social and political change in Nambula. All of the negative attributes that ‘el sobrino’ embodies are ultimately denounced by the author. Unlike *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*, the future of this small post-independent country is seen in a potentially positive light. However, there is a definite sense that the author wishes to draw attention to the sustained impact of the administration on the general population. Similarly, this novel explores the trajectory of those who are arbitrarily assigned to positions of power and the unpredictability of their situation.

It has been demonstrated that in *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*, situational interactions between characters are framed by power relations. These interactions operate on two levels. Firstly, at the level of writing, the identities of the characters are depicted telescopically. Secondly, these power relations are utilised by the characters in order to gain advantage over others. It has also been established that most of the

protagonists, with the exception of 'el sobrino', exercise their power in order to survive and not to gain wealth. In the case of Claudio, he found that it was more rewarding to take a day off work in order to make money and willingly placed himself in a subordinate role to allow others to exert power over him. Finally, in *Nambula*, power is bestowed in a nepotistic manner and the inhabitants are seen to adopt a chameleon-like approach to identity whereby they must adapt quickly to avoid punishment.

In both of these works, there is a strong presence of power originating from the state (referent power) as embodied in the President. It is also evident that the characters exploit situational interactions with others in order to benefit themselves. Adjá-Adjá and *compañero* are not exploiting their power to get rich; they are simply trying to survive. Conversely, 'el sobrino' seeks to accumulate wealth through his abuse of power. What does this tell us about identity? The facets of identity are expressed telescopically by the different characters benefit them in certain situations. However, the degree to which they are rewarded seems to vary with the amount of actual power they possess. For Nkogo Esono, then, the expression of identity is only relevant for a short period of time, described by Reynolds and Herman-Kinney as a 'constantly evolving present moment' (2003: 382). His characters demonstrate that they must be adaptable and responsive to the dynamics of power while consistently evaluating their situation in order to survive. Finally, the power relations examined in this chapter confirm the position of the ruling élite in the active promotion of a sense of national identity. The referent power originating from the dictator is visible at the level of the individual and is testament to the administration's efforts to homogenise the population.

CHAPTER FIVE

HETEROGENEITY AND IDENTITY IN JUAN TOMÁS ÁVILA LAUREL

Of the writers examined in this dissertation, he has published works in the widest variety of genres. In addition to novels, he has also written essays, poetry, short stories and plays.¹¹⁵ However, what makes his writing particularly interesting are his critical publications which are both politically engaging and culturally revealing.¹¹⁶ Ávila Laurel dispels the hegemonic discourse which is promulgated primarily by the ruling élite. The words *Unity*, *Peace* and *Justice*, which are found on the nation's coat of arms, are at the core of the administration's activities to promote the image of a united country. This author's creative work represents an alternative by focusing on the elements that do not fit the prescribed national identity. In this chapter, *El desmayo de Judas* (2001), *Cuentos crudos* (2007), *Rusia se va a Asamse* (2002b) and *Nadie tiene buena fama en este país* (2002a) will be analysed to reveal that, for this author in particular, a variety of individuals are represented in order to stress the heterogeneity of collective society.¹¹⁷ Before proceeding to the texts, it is important to contextualise the concept of heterogeneity.

In Ávila Laurel's works, there is little continuity when it comes to identifying protagonists and the location of the action. At first glance, it becomes apparent that his protagonists are of both Spanish and Equatorial Guinean backgrounds. Furthermore, within those categories, various geographical areas and diverse ethnic backgrounds are

¹¹⁵ Born in Malabo to Annobonese parents, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel is the only contemporary author included in this study who has not lived or studied abroad (Nistal Rosique, 2008: 103). He spent his early formative years on the island of Annobón before returning to Bioko. Nistal Rosique points out an underlying motive in his transgeneric output: 'Ha practicado todos los géneros, poesía, teatro, narrativa, ensayo y artículos periodísticos. Su fuerte está en la crítica social, siempre cargada de ironía. Sea cual sea el género literario y el argumento Juan Tomás Ávila siempre utilizará sus obras como pulpitos de denuncia' (2008: 112).

¹¹⁶ For example see also: *Misceláneas Guineo Ecuatorianas: Del estado colonial al estado dictatorial* (2001), *Cómo convertir este país en un paraíso: Otras reflexiones sobre Guinea Ecuatorial* (2005a), *Guinea Ecuatorial. Visceras* (2006), 'Notas sobre la literatura de Guinea', *Hispanic Research Journal* (2005b).

¹¹⁷ Only one of his narrative works, published prior to 2007, could not be included here, as it was impossible to obtain a copy: *Áwala cu sangui* (2000). It is hoped that in the future, the analysis of this novel may be added to this section, along with his most recent publications, in order to have a more complete understanding of the author's fiction.

represented. For example, in *Nadie tiene buena fama in este país*, he includes elements of Fang traditions and local culture.¹¹⁸

As a prolific writer and a key member of his literary generation, Ávila Laurel also actively participates in conferences and fora.¹¹⁹ The process of writing and the role of the author are both issues upon which Ávila Laurel has reflected. His political engagement is also relevant as it undoubtedly colours his expression of identity. He has commented on this in the following terms:

El escaso disfrute de la libertad en el presente y el pasado hace que se cargue sobre la literatura y sus agentes las responsabilidades no asumidas por las autoridades y la sociedad civil, apenas existente [...]. Habida cuenta de los elevados índices de analfabetismo de Guinea, con sus devastadores efectos tanto sobre los escritores como sobre los lectores guineanos, del imparable auge de las corrientes globalizadoras, desvalorizadoras de lo ‘nacional’, lo autóctono, y del monopolio exclusivo del hecho literario por las multinacionales de la edición, le urge a la literatura guineana ‘dar el golpe’, ofrecer a la comunidad internacional un producto que suscite la suficiente atención para ser tenida en cuenta, como ya ocurrió con el llamado boom latinoamericano, salvando, claro está, diferencias, distancias, circunstancias y dimensiones. (2005b: 172)

In the above quotation, the author emphasises the wish for international recognition. These comments are invaluable when examining the writing process and the weight of responsibility of contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors. Writing becomes important because it engages with pertinent issues which are absent from political discourse. The function of literature in this context can be seen as an advocate for social change. It reflects both the internal and international pressures which shape literary expression and reception both at home and abroad.

Furthermore, the connection Ávila Laurel makes with the ‘Boom’ in Latin America is significant as the act of creating a respected place for Equatorial Guinean authors within Spanish-language literary circles is comparable to the goals accomplished by the Latin American authors of that generation. Ávila Laurel suggests

¹¹⁸ As an area of future research, it would be interesting to investigate the fictional representation of the diverse ethnic groups and their traditions. Similar to the study of indigenous language, the depiction of local culture could inform a fruitful analysis of Equatorial Guinean texts.

¹¹⁹ Since Ávila Laurel continues to publish frequently, it was necessary, for practical reasons, to restrict the framework of reference. Consequently, the two novels he has published since 2007, *Avión de ricos, ladrón de cerdos* (2008) and *Arde el monte de noche* (2009), will not be analysed here. *Avión de ricos, ladrón de cerdos* uses the oral tradition of storytelling as a vehicle of social criticism. Although this novel has an over-arching plot, the reader is presented with a series of independent, smaller stories which illustrate the author’s criticism of issues such as poverty, corruption and the lack of public services. *Arde el monte de noche* takes place on the island of Annobón. He is the only one of the contemporary authors who sets his novels there.

that within a transatlantic readership, Equatorial Guinean authors can actively solicit critical attention from the West which would result in their works becoming more visible to an international audience (Ávila Laurel, 2005b: 173).

By seeking to expand their readership, these contemporary authors are commenting on a process which relates to their expression of identity. The act of soliciting awareness from the outside world emphasises that their readers are mostly not local and positions Equatorial Guinean literature on the periphery of Spanish-language literature. The desire by the authors to be recognised for making an active literary contribution to the international market also highlights the Spanish language as an essential component of Equatorial Guinean literature. In brief, the inclusion of Equatorial Guinean novels in the canon of Spanish-language literature would re-centre these authors from their current marginal position, an experience which has the potential to affect the way in which these authors express identity in their fictional works.

Most of the thematic content explored in Ávila Laurel's narrative revolves around the experience of individuals in their environment. It has already been stated that his literature is politically engaged in that it openly criticises shortcomings within the country, most often in relation to both infrastructure and basic services. Simultaneously, Ávila Laurel is conscious of the international attention that the country receives from the exploitation of its oil. When discussing this matter, he explains:

Todo el ruido que hagan [empresas extranjeras, sobre todo, petroleras] hará que haya más ojos sobre Guinea, lo que se traducirá en más presión sobre las autoridades para que mejoren la vida del ciudadano. Y algo se hará. Habrá más carreteras. Un hospital más, quizá. Pero habrá más hoteles, más negocios de particulares, más restaurantes y algún edificio que se vea desde lejos. Pero detrás de todos estos edificios deslumbrantes, lejos de las luces de neón, se levantarán las míseras casas de los ciudadanos de este país, estas casas a las que acudirán tras saltar de las gradas de sus campos embarrados, recorrer las calles de aguas fecales, bañarse en los ríos. (Ávila Laurel, 2003: np)

This passage offers a pessimistic view of the future in spite of any outside attention. Although some of the amenities may raise the standard of living in Equatorial Guinea for some, most of the population will remain unaffected. Ávila Laurel makes these negative predictions not only for the benefit of alerting his countrymen, but for an international audience. In his view, the paradoxes within the country are nothing new for the average person: 'no son desconocidos por los guineanos' (Ávila Laurel, 2003:

np). What is particular about Ávila Laurel's writing is the way he exposes the administration's priorities, taking a critical stance in order to demonstrate these contradictions for both his local and his international readership.¹²⁰

Gustau Nerín critically discusses contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature in terms of fiction discovering reality. He writes:

La verosimilitud es la clave de esta literatura, destinada a enfrentar al público guineano con su realidad más próxima. En otros ámbitos sería paradójico que un lector se emocionara leyendo las anécdotas habituales de su vecino, pero en Guinea poner por escrito las miserias del país es dejar constancia de un universo que se trata de ocultar. Tanto *Adjá-adjá*, de Maximiliano Ncogo, como *Rusia se va a Asamse*, de Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, gozaron de una excepcional acogida de público en Guinea, ya que a través de su lenguaje cuidado pero popular, se remitían a un mundo conocido por los guineanos de a pie. Su literatura se convierte, pues, en el mejor instrumento para combatir la retórica vacía. (2001: 128)

In the same vein as Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, Ávila Laurel's narratives have been described as 'nuevo costumbrismo nacional' (Nistal Rosique, 2008: 114). This designation is partly due to the protagonists' use of popular language, tying the text to the local experience (Nistal Rosique, 2008: 114). The depiction of local language provides a space where the author can employ diverse styles to express his ideas.

The situational interactions presented in his texts reveal the heterogeneous nature of Equatorial Guinean society. As Elisa Rizo rightly states: "[L]a estética literaria de Ávila Laurel incluye el reconocimiento de la creatividad y la 'agencia' de los habitantes de su país ante la falta de oportunidades para el diálogo y la negociación con los poderes gubernamentales" (2005: 176). His narratives offer a space where controversial issues can be explored.

Ávila Laurel's texts do not all strictly adhere to a traditional narrative form. The lack of generic coherence and the difficulty in classifying Ávila Laurel's texts are aspects of his writing which mirror his expression of identity. As a member of the generation termed by Djangany as *neo-independentista*, he shares in the task of developing Equatorial Guinean literature. As is argued throughout this dissertation, each of the authors in this group expresses identity in a different way which is revealed through examining the situational interactions presented in their texts. For Ávila Laurel,

¹²⁰ The contradictions between perceptions of African development and Western conceptions of the term are thoroughly explored in Chabal and Deloz *Africa works: disorder as political instrument* (1999). They frame the differences in definitions of modernization and trace the effects of colonialism and tradition on modern political systems in Africa.

this coincides with a broader statement made by Ngom on Equatorial Guinean identity which he describes as: ‘narrated by literary discourse, in conjunction with other cultural practices, [it] is marked by deterritorialization and dislocation on one hand, and by cultural ethnic heterogeneity, on the other’ (2001: 34). Heterogeneity, then, runs throughout Equatorial Guinean writing and becomes synonymous with the expression of identity as it mirrors the diversity of the individuals in his or her social reality.

Ávila Laurel’s narratives therefore offer a reaction to the imposition of a single ‘national identity’, one that is promoted by the government in order to present a unified population. Elisa Rizo states:

En la narrativa de este autor, el concepto de una identidad nacional se propone sin idealizaciones extremas de un espíritu patrio y sí con miramiento diacrónico de intereses económicos internacionales y de manipulaciones políticas que han resultado en la marginalización de Guinea Ecuatorial del ámbito internacional. (2005, 176)

Her comments denounce political decisions as well as the economic pressures exerted on the country which are primarily driven by globalisation. Therefore, Ávila Laurel’s texts respond to the homogenising national identity propagated by the ruling élite, demonstrating that, in spite of official efforts to promote unity, national identity is, in fact, fragmented (Rizo, 2005: 176).

Indeed, the notion of a single Equatorial Guinean national identity is a rather contentious issue. Igor Cusack has written extensively on the subject and consistently emphasises the complexity of the topic, stating that: ‘to write of a national identity is an oversimplification’ (1999c: 43 [emphasis in original]). Instead, Cusack describes ‘territorial identities’ that highlight the diversity found within the population, as well as shared ‘supporting ideologies’ which distinguishes between what is considered to be territorial and what is considered to be national (1999c: 109). Cusack further argues that nationalism is an allotrope of ethnicity (1999c: 150) and, as such, contributes to ‘a multi-faceted Equatoguinean identity which will allow different individuals to imagine their nation in different ways’ (1999c: 152). He explores in detail the homogenising efforts of the administration to foster a united sense of national identity to which, it is argued here, Ávila Laurel’s texts offer a response.

Ávila Laurel’s reference to Annobón provides a unique perspective on an isolated location that is often overlooked and which is not employed as a setting by any

other author.¹²¹ His writing is significant in the broader context of Equatorial Guinean literature as it represents this area as well as some of the social implications of geographic remoteness. Its position, specific history and culture are counterpoints to the idea of a homogenised country. The Annobonese are ‘poseedores de un pasado histórico propio y de una identidad guineoecuatorial particular que desmiente la norma promovida por el gobierno’ (Rizo, 2005: 177). The perspective of the author who has Annobonese origins, coupled with the setting of two of his novels and one short story (*Áwala cu sangui*, *Arde el monte de noche* and *Un caso de corrupción*), underline that Ávila Laurel’s writing presents marginalised aspects of Equatorial Guinean society, representing people and places which disprove the homogenising efforts of the national discourse, and reminding the reader of the heterogeneous nature of Equatorial Guinea.

One specific way in which Ávila Laurel’s expression of identity is characterised as heterogeneous is through the depiction of female characters. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that Ávila Laurel injects a feminist perspective into his writing, the female characters that appear in his novels represent a diverse cross section of women: Equatorial Guinean, Spanish, Beninese, young, old, religious and secular. Female protagonists provide a counterbalance to the predominantly male characters found in contemporary Equatorial Guinean fiction. The re-centring of his characters in general, and his female characters in particular, demonstrates that he privileges diversity in his writing.

The emphasis here is not on Ávila Laurel’s view of women, nor how he represents them in his texts, but rather that he employs them as examples of the heterogeneous nature of the fictional society he presents. Indeed, more needs to be written on the position of female characters and writers in Equatorial Guinean literature.¹²² Nevertheless, for the purpose of this dissertation, the inclusion of female characters supports the claim that Ávila Laurel’s writing is heterogeneous. This

¹²¹ This fact could indicate an interesting area for future study. The island of Annobón is unique in the geographical landscape of Equatorial Guinea and possesses its own distinct history and interpretation of colonial inheritance. The importance of this island was recently affirmed at the international conference held at Hofstra University where a panel was dedicated to it entitled ‘The disappearing Atlantic island: Annobón’.

¹²² Some work has already been carried out in this area. For example: Mbaré Ngom ‘Relato de una vida y escritura femenina: *Ekomo*, de María Nsue Angue’ (1995b), Mendoogo Minsongui Dieudonné ‘Mujer y creación literaria en Guinea Ecuatorial’ (1997), Remei Sipi Mayo *Inmigración y género: el caso de Guinea Ecuatorial* (2004), Marta Sofía López ‘Escritoras guineanas’ (2009), Cecilia Sáenz-Roby ‘La mujer africana: entre hibridez y exilio’ (2009) and Natalia Álvarez Méndez *Palabras desencadenadas: aproximación a la teoría postcolonial y a la escritura hispanonegroafricana* (2010: 171-177).

advances the understanding of identity in his texts by broadening the scope of social interactions to include gender, thus illuminating his treatment of identity expression in his texts.

It is not only through the use of female characters that Ávila Laurel expresses the heterogeneous nature of identity. His choice of protagonists is unpredictable as they oscillate between Spanish, Equatorial Guinean, male, female, colonial, postcolonial. One aspect to bear in mind is that the individual can often enrich the collective. Sullivan explains:

In effect, the African novel offers a different read on the quest for identity. Based on the broadly accepted notion that social identity subsumes personal identity, the journey toward the self ultimately includes and/or represents the journey toward the heart of the community [...]. The African hero's quest for identity is the quest for his or her society's identity. (2006: 184)

Sullivan's comments make it possible to interpret each of Ávila Laurel's characters as a representative of a different facet of a collective identity. We can relate this to the concept of telescopic identity as discussed in previous chapters because the broad definition of the collective contrasts with the narrow conception of the individual. The spectrum of characters can therefore represent the heterogeneous collective. The chosen texts will now be examined with these ideas in mind.

El desmayo de Judas

With its reference to a Biblical character, the title of this novel indicates religious content. This is supported by the fact that, during an interview conducted in 2004, Ávila Laurel said that the Bible is one of the books which influenced him as a child (Rizo, 2004a: 28). He explained further: 'Bueno, pues solamente porque es un libro que tiene muchas cosas que se pueden leer y también porque la Biblia es un libro que mucha gente conoce' (Rizo, 2004a: 31). It is not entirely surprising that religious themes appear in contemporary Equatorial Guinean narratives given the Christianising objectives of Spanish colonisation. However, Ávila Laurel's comment also indicates that many people can relate to the Bible, making his references accessible to a larger audience. In addition, Ávila Laurel also wishes to present a reflection on religion in times of globalisation (2005b: 172).

This novel is set in Valencia, Spain, and begins with a baby's difficult entry into the world. The story centres on a couple, Ana Garamond and her partner, Juan Vives, who is absent from the family unit because he is mentally unstable. Within a strictly Spanish context, issues of historical re-evaluation, metafiction, and African perspectives are explored. Judas, who remains an infant throughout the novel, is left orphaned at the end after his father commits suicide and his traumatised mother is subsequently hospitalised. This novel will be analysed to clarify how Ávila Laurel frames various aspects of the work which will subsequently illustrate his treatment of identity.

Female Characters

Two important characters in this novel are female: Ana Garamond, a Spaniard, and María del Carmen Abang, an Equatorial Guinean. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the author attempts to capture a broad range of diverse characters – with a specific interest in women – and represents them in his narratives. Ávila Laurel himself explains:

En esta novela se ven los polos opuestos de diferentes tipos de intereses. La mujer que no ha abrazado la vida religiosa se ve atrapada, pues su amor es obligatorio. Porque si tiene hijo, tiene que amar por obligación, porque ya lo tiene y en otro caso (María del Carmen), la mujer abraza una vida por voluntad. Si es por voluntad es distinto. (Rizo, 2004a: 32)

Each woman's situation is different and the reader is given the opportunity to compare and contrast them. María del Carmen Abang, for example, illustrates the disjuncture between European and African cultures. As Lewis explains, having come to Spain as a religious woman to help comfort the sick, María is forced to confront the fact that, although for Africans 'death is a prolongation of life', for Europeans it is 'distant, impersonal, final' (2007: 191). When faced with such different cultural values, 'Abang empezó a perder el juicio' and, as a result, chooses to return to Equatorial Guinea (Ávila Laurel, 2001: 99).¹²³ The contrast between these two cultures is played out through the situational interactions of these female characters.

¹²³ Also quoted in Lewis (2007: 191).

Historical Perspectives

Just as the author presents the reader with two differing female perspectives, he also invites him/her to reconsider the way we interpret ‘official’ versions of history.¹²⁴ This task is accomplished in the instant that Ana names her baby. The following situational interaction illustrates this type of historical re-evaluation:

[...] pero mi experiencia me dice que un nombre con tan mala fama... En eso Ana abrió los ojos suavemente, pues los tenía cerrados hasta ahora.

– ¿Fama? – preguntó.

– Me refiero a la historia de Jesús y sus apóstoles, con las treinta monedas y todo eso.

¿Sabes cómo acabó, no?

– Judas no es un mal nombre. (2001: 10-11)

With this gesture, Ana reclaims a name that has traditionally been associated with betrayal and challenges the reader’s preconceived understanding of the Biblical figure. Her decision is seen as an act of conceptual transgression, going against the accepted norm (Sampedro Vizcaya, 2003: 306). Ana and Juan belong to a group which could easily be interpreted as a cult. This mysterious group values and defends Judas:

Hermanos, nada de lo que hasta ahora hemos oído del apóstol Judas es como nos han querido mostrar. Y a esa conclusión, hermanos, se llega estudiando con la luz divina la palabra de Dios. Son nuestros pecados los que han permitido que durante siglos y siglos permanezcamos en la ignorancia. Y una razón que apoya nuestras afirmaciones es que Judas, el gran maestro, fue discípulo elegido del Señor y el Señor no puede elegir con su voluntad lo malo. Las revelaciones que ciertos líderes de algunas iglesias ocultaban a sus miembros contribuyeron en la formación de una imagen retorcida de este apóstol de la Iglesia. (2001: 49)

The argument that those who hold power can manipulate our perception of history is the central message here. The power of influence, which is often overlooked, is signalled by the author as he urges the reader to consider alternative points of view. By opposing the hegemonic discourse, he is giving precedence to heterogeneity in his novel. The name of Judas becomes disassociated from the fate of the historical figure which in turn re-centres the identity of the fictional character. One could go further and suggest that these historical assumptions also relate to the reconsideration of the colonial relationship between Equatorial Guinea and Spain. The author stresses the

¹²⁴ This aspect of Ávila Laurel’s writing could be explored further from a poststructuralist perspective. Specifically, a deeper exploration of Foucault’s criticism of History and to what extent this is expressed in Ávila Laurel’s texts.

importance of perspective when evaluating the past on either side of the colonial divide and shows how an understanding of these events can be affected by perception.

Metafiction

One final point must be considered in connection with this novel and that is the metafictional dimension. It is significant that this technique is present in three of the four authors included in this dissertation.¹²⁵ Moreover, this link relates to the ways in which each author expresses identity through narrative, pausing to evaluate the use of the genre. Notably, these metafictional discussions arise out of situational interactions between characters as it has already been established that these types of exchanges are essential for the expression of identity. Ávila Laurel writes:

- ¿Sabes lo que es una novela?
- Una historia inventada, un cuento. [...].
- Escucha. Una novela es un hecho absolutamente real que ha ocurrido exactamente como lo cuenta el escritor. La única diferencia es que este escritor no sabe en qué lugar del mundo ha ocurrido o está ocurriendo lo que cuenta ni las consecuencias que tiene para los que la padecen o la viven o gozan.
[...]
- ¿qué ocurre cuando nos gusta una novela? Nos gusta porque nos hemos identificado con sus reflexiones y la historia nos gusta. (2001: 24-25)

Here, the author highlights the relationship between reality and fiction through dialogue. The role of the author is vital in creating fiction which is based in reality, but that reality is not necessarily experienced by the author. The reader's identification with the text is essential to gain a positive reception for the novel. In this way, the diversity of content mirrors the heterogeneous expression of identity. If novels are received positively by a variety of readers, then, it can be assumed that there is a symbiotic relationship between readers and the content of narratives.

To complete the discussion surrounding the relationship between fiction and reality, an interaction between two characters scrutinises the job of the author:

- La costumbre de espiar y grabar las conversaciones en las mesas de los bares. ¿Te imaginas lo que supondría para un novelista poder escuchar lo que dicen dos enamorados que apenas hablan con el aliento sentados en una mesa?
- Y, ¿crees que realmente tienen interés lo que dicen dos enamorados?

¹²⁵ Nkogo Esono is the only writer included in this dissertation who does not employ metafictional techniques.

- Yo no sé si tiene interés pero no ignoras que toda la literatura se basa en las conversaciones de supuestos seres imaginarios. No sólo imaginarios, sino supuestos. Ahora, dime tú si valdrían menos las conversaciones verdaderas.
- Es que la literatura no es de verdad.
- No perderé mi tiempo otra vez diciéndote que en la literatura no se discute la verdad, pues no es lo que se busca. Lo que se busca es la identificación del lector con los personajes y su historia; conseguida ésta, los personajes se echan a andar y los vemos por las calles. (2001: 89-90)

Again, the author emphasises that the engagement of the reader is an integral part in the creation of fiction, which links this novel to Djangany's *Todo llega con las olas del mar*. Not only is Judas a character in Djangany's short story, but they 'exist' because they are 'read' and the relationship between fiction and identity is mirrored in both narratives.

In this novel, the presentation of opposing female characters, the reconsideration of historical figures and the discussion of metafiction all contribute to the understanding of Ávila Laurel's expression of identity. Setting this novel in Valencia, with Spanish protagonists, suggests that he does not seek to represent a *single* identity. The variety of themes and characters imply that he is presenting various facets of a complex society which, as exemplified by the location, includes aspects of Hispanic cultural inheritance. This novel persuades the reader to consider seemingly unrelated elements which, upon further reflection, illustrate the author's heterogeneous expression of identity.

Cuentos crudos

Published in 2007, this collection of short stories is a vehicle for potent social criticism. The title itself suggests a play on words that relates to the content in that the majority of the narratives are short, *underdone*, *unrefined* or *blunt*. The collection contains five stories; the first one 'Mares de olas' is substantially longer than the others whereas the ironically entitled 'Un esfuerzo sobrehumano' is less than a page. The varying length of the stories, as well as the range of their content, means that this collection is not easily categorised and it is this lack of uniformity that becomes a platform for social critique. These stories will be briefly summarised highlighting specific points of interest which feed into Ávila Laurel's broader treatment of identity expression. While each story showcases elements of daily life – albeit satirically in most cases – there is a strong relationship between the individual and the collective. The various situational

interactions between characters are the mechanism which drives his expression of identity in this collection.

In 'Mares de olas', the administration cancels Christmas, an action which satirically showcases the absurdity of the decrees issued in a fictional portrayal of Equatorial Guinea. The people are told that they must not only return all items purchased for Christmas, but also those items or services that were used in the preparations for the holiday, for example: food and haircuts must be returned to their original state (2007: 6). A copy of the announcement is included in the story and it is signed '*Por Una Guinea Mejor* El que firma aquí las cosas' (2007: 7 [italics in original]). The humorous way in which the decree is represented does not implicate the President directly, but the slogan is currently employed by the administration.

The story points to the irrational assembly of committees established in order to implement new laws, including '– Somos de la Comisión Técnica de Interpretación del decreto-ley número 259 ¿Qué desea?' (2007: 16). Instead of writing a practical law in the first instance, the government operates retroactively in order to contain the chaos which the initial law had caused. By examining the situational interactions between the characters, irrational scenes are noted in which citizens are placed in unforgiving circumstances and forced to obey the rules by members of the administration. The author reveals the absurdity of such actions which result in the inability of the regime to control the individual.

The use of hyperbole adds a humorous element to the text without taking away from the underlying message. The inhabitants are faced with the impossible task of complying with the decree as well as managing the intervention of several different branches of the government, leaving the reader with a sense of disorder and despair. Finally, at the end of the story, when the people are assembled to hear a speech from the President, there is a power outage (2007: 33). The lack of infrastructure within the country is even detrimental to the President's ability to deliver a message to the public. This scene depicts a daily reality in which citizens, regardless of social status, cannot rely on basic services.

In the second story, 'La lección', the community bathes in the river which sets the stage for explicit content relating to nudity, bodily functions and the size of male genitalia. The author also signals the need for participation by the general population in political matters. He affirms: 'Como los guineanos han renunciado a saber nada de las funciones de los que mandan, ocurre lo que ocurre' (2007: 35). The lack of political

interest or responsibility is exemplified by the daily reality of going to the river to access water. This criticism has a dual purpose: firstly, to underscore the lack of services, in this case water, and secondly, to highlight that the average person does not take an active role in promoting social change. This sentiment is an echo of Ávila Laurel's response to the imposed hegemonic discourse.

'La sonrisa popular' follows a political meeting of seven representatives from Central African nations. The interactions that are featured here underline the futility of these types of gatherings, for example: 'En este ambiente relajado empezaron a discutir sobre cuál de los siete países tenía los mejores aplaudidores, en qué país se aplaudía mejor' (2007: 41). The juvenile nature of the discussion is depicted and the talks soon break down because of disagreement. This story stresses the fragility of the political relationships between African nations and the ease with which they can be dissolved over insignificant issues. The situational interactions between the individual representatives of each country are therefore emblematic of a larger issue, with Ávila Laurel illustrating what he perceives as a continental problem. Consequently, this story emphasises the symbolic relationship between the individual and the collective and sheds light on how he employs this technique in his texts to express identity.

'Un esfuerzo sobrehumano' is, as already mentioned, the shortest in length but, arguably, the most potent in terms of its social criticism. The story details the enormous efforts by the employees of the only electrical company in Equatorial Guinea to ensure that, for three days, there was not a single power outage in one particular district, while others were left with candlelight (2007: 43). It draws attention to the difficulty of performing a seemingly simple task and the disproportionate effort for a relatively minimal result is a comment on the inefficient management of resources, as well as the arduous task of maintaining a system which is not capable of meeting the population's energy requirements. In a broader context, the inability to fulfil the expectations of the population results in disillusion and highlights the self-serving nature of the administration.

'Un caso de corrupción', situated in Annobón, the significance of which has been outlined in the introduction to this chapter, tells the story of the first encounter the narrator had with corruption. Ávila Laurel writes:

Más tarde, cuando se destaparon las ollas de sorpresa sobre la realidad nacional, empezamos a leer sobre corrupción, sobre fraudes y sobre otros manejos no legales de los que nos gobernaban para afianzarse en sus nuevos entornos de africanidad,

desterrados los supuestos civilizatorios de la madre España. Y fue cuando supimos que el caso de militar innombrable había sido de corrupción. (2007: 46)

The unnamed soldier suffered from a condition which meant that he had a constant erection which prohibited him from performing the duties required of him as a soldier (2007: 47). The narrator goes as far as to defend the soldier by saying that he could intimidate the enemy (2007: 47). At the end, the narrator admits that he does not completely understand the case of corruption and asks the reader to forgive mistakes made in the use of military language. Similar to other stories in this collection, this account focuses on the absurd to prove a point. Here again, the author employs the individual as a symbol of larger national issues.

In this collection as a whole, the author presents the numerous examples of controversial issues in a variety of settings and through the use of diverse characters. The issues that concern him, such as the lack of water and reliable electricity, the arbitrary imposition of decrees and the obsession with male virility, are tied together by the critical perspective they offer. The texts hold a mirror to society to show its heterogeneous nature and this allows Ávila Laurel to satirically draw attention to a diverse cross section of the population. Below the layer of blatant social criticism lies a commentary on the expression of identity. In contrast to Nkogo Esono's work, where power and situational interaction between characters is highlighted, here Ávila Laurel draws attention to the numerous identities that exemplify contemporary Equatorial Guinean society. The representation of the heterogeneous nature of Equatorial Guinean society characterises his approach to the issue and is embodied in this collection of short stories which contains seemingly random portrayals of characters and events, each one representative of a social reality. Finally, his stories solidify the symbiotic relationship that exists between the individual and the collective.

Rusia se va a Asamse

This short story was published in 2002 and takes place in Malabo. The female protagonist is called *Rusia* because her father had spent time there: 'Su padre, amante de la república europea del mismo nombre, estudió allí y la cosa le fue tan bien que,

como agradecimiento, bautizó a su hija con tal nombre' (2002b: 86).¹²⁶ The narrator makes this into a joke by saying that it is fortunate that not many people had the same idea, because then there might be several 'Españas' 'Francias' and 'Chinas' (2002b: 86). Although this statement is framed in a purely comical way, it illustrates the influence, both political and ideological, which these foreign countries have had on Equatorial Guinea. Consequently, the effect of this process becomes visible in the most basic form of identification, the name.

The Globalised Market

Set in the Equatorial Guinean capital of Malabo, Lewis describes the city as 'a truly diverse cultural entity' (2007: 75). Asamse is the market which 'represents Equatorial Guinea's primary fashion and style connection to the modern world' (Lewis, 2007: 74). The reader is told that the market brings happiness to half of the capital's inhabitants (2002b: 89) and that the 'modern world', which is referred to as *mundo cero*, is responsible for supplying the market with goods. The narrator explains:

Cuando los ricos del mundo cero se dieron cuenta de que los de este tercer mundo acabarían desnudos si no les echaba una mano, o dos, se despojaron de sus pantalones, de sus faldas, de sus calcetines y de sus bragas, lo metieron en sacos, lo cerraron con anillos de hierro y lo depositaron en manos de negociantes que sólo deben mirar abajo, y que son prendas que, una vez sacadas, no se vuelven a tocar. También están los hombres y mujeres de Cristo, que aprovechan cuando sus hermanos están cansados de una ropa para pensar en la obra de misericordia número seis: vestir al desnudo del tercer mundo. (2002b: 89-90)

This passage underlines the paternalistic attitude of the 'first' world with regard to the 'third' world. The author subverts the perceived superiority of the 'first' world by referring to it as 'zero'. The rebalancing of these numbers would then see the 'third' world in a positive way, holding an advantage over a designation that signifies 'nothing'. The obvious humorous tone also implicates the missionaries who help to distribute these donated goods. An interesting aspect here is that these clothes are sold in the market and not simply given out to the population.

¹²⁶ References to Russia are not uncommon in Equatorial Guinean literature. For example, Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng makes refers to the influence this country has had on Equatorial Guinea through his character Patricio in both *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) and *Huellas bajo tierra* (1998).

Rusia, the female protagonist, is described as having access to ‘el pasaporte lingüístico’ of the city:

- Sista, cam.
- Lef mi, mi no to yu juman
- Yu sabi wetin a wan tel yu?
- Loc yu mot, yu no guet moni. ¿Yu fit maten mi? (2002b: 89)

The inclusion of a passage in *pichi* reflects the linguistic diversity of Malabo. Also, alluding to the use of this language as a *passport* suggests that it is frequently employed, at least in the market setting, and provides access to other inhabitants. As language forms an integral part of identity, this facet is utilised by the protagonist during a situational interaction in order to communicate effectively.¹²⁷ This young female protagonist, who demonstrates modern fashion by having her hair parted to the side (2002b: 91), goes to the market in search of trendy items. These are described to the reader in the following manner:

En Asamse se vende de todo y en este lugar se agradece que los guineanos no hayamos adoptado todavía la mala costumbre de andar deprisa. ¿Se imaginan lo poco que se podría ver y comprar si los que van allí tuvieran los pasos endiablados de los ciudadanos de arriba? No comprarían nada. Así, van despacito y miran cinturones, sujetadores de mujer (pues los hombres no los llevan), botas de España, Francia, Corea. Camisetas de Italia, England, Singapore, y bragas apátridas, pues cuando las bragas llegan al Asamse oficial de Malabo ya no tienen etiquetas. (2002b: 90)

The above quote signals cultural differences between the *mundo cero* and Equatorial Guinea, specifically in relation to time. The bad habit of always being in a hurry would prevent those from the *mundo cero* from buying articles in a market; therefore it is not only the articles, but also a way of life that is being rejected so that those items may be purchased by others.

The articles themselves are politically charged as it is significant that they come from such a diverse cross section of nations and suggests the scale of international influence within the country. Although this idea is humorously expressed in the description of underwear and bras, it is also a commentary on the influx of foreign items since the discovery of oil. This has noticeable effects on Rusia’s expression of

¹²⁷ The use of language in contemporary Equatorial Guinean is a promising area for future research. I acknowledge the potential interest it may have, but for the purpose of this dissertation, it is being signalled here as an example of identity expression during situational interactions.

physical identity as she displays her 'Westernised' self by following the waves of second-hand trends which appear in the market.

The desire for these articles causes Rusia to get into a fight with another girl over a skirt. As the fight escalates, Rusia walks away and, in her haste, knocks down a Beninese saleswoman. The situational interaction between the two women is revealing:

Para el colmo de la desgracia, la de Cotonú hacia [sic] sus reivindicaciones económicas en *pichi*. Ya hemos dicho que Rusia habla a la perfección esta lengua de ciudad, pero ahora es distinto. Primero debe desmarcarse totalmente de la estirpe innoble de la africana. Debe demostrar que va a clase y sabe algo de verbos y adverbios y hacerse la modosita por hablar con este hilito de voz que usan ciertas chicas para parecer educadas. Vacilonas. Además, tiene dolor y se sabe de hace mucho que los lamentos, ruegos y oraciones se hacen mejor en lengua española que es la que entiende Dios, privilegio conseguido por los Reyes Católicos y sus nietos durante siglos de lucha con moros, almohades, judíos, arrianos, calvinistas, zuinglistas y toda estirpe de reformadores. (2002b: 94-95)

The position of these two languages creates an interesting topic of discussion. Although the languages are relayed by individuals, the situational interaction can be extended to a national context. The hierarchical position of the Spanish language vis-à-vis *pichi* means that Rusia has the upper hand by conversing in Spanish. This situational interaction also draws attention to the position of other African nationals within Equatorial Guinea. The reader is told that the saleswoman belongs to a group of women known as *cotonús*. They are tough and come alone to the country to make money (2002b: 95-96). Therefore, by conversing in Spanish, Rusia not only affirms her status as 'educada', but also differentiates herself from other African nationalities by evoking her Hispanic cultural inheritance. This scene demonstrates that identification and self-differentiation are necessary in the expression of identity. By placing his protagonist in an inherently diverse setting, the situational interactions allow her to express her identity telescopically, highlighting the facets of her identity that will give her an advantage over the Other.

The Individual and the Collective

This story discusses, at a local and individual level, issues that pertain to the national and the collective situation. In the commercial centre of Malabo, Ávila Laurel portrays both the localisms of the area as well as topics of worker-migration and globalisation. Rusia's experience as an individual in the market is used as a platform to discuss these

issues which include language and, more specifically, the position of Spanish in relation to *pichi*. Although the author employs a great deal of sarcasm and humour in his narrative, the reader is encouraged to reflect seriously on these issues. At the heart of his criticism is the influence of foreign countries in Equatorial Guinea, represented by the various articles of clothing being sold in the market. This dynamic space also signals cultural differences, for example, in the conception of time, as well as gaps in the perception of modernity between *mundo cero* and the ‘third world’. The market becomes symbolic of telescopic identity in that it portrays many of the elements which are embodied by the individual, represented by Rusia. Therefore, her situational interactions within the market can be understood as her expressions of the different facets of her own identity.

Nadie tiene buena fama en este país

Set between Malabo and Bata, this novel takes place in what the reader can assume is the present. Temporally stable, unlike some of the other narratives discussed in this chapter, the author locates this text in Equatorial Guinea’s history with references such as: ‘Le mataron en tiempo de Macías’ (2002a: 22). The first-person narrator of this story only appears in the first paragraph before changing to the third person.

Unreliable Narrator

We have had occasion to observe some similarities between Ávila Laurel and Djangany with respect to style. The case of unreliable first-person narrators, present in *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* and *Autorretrato con un infiel*, is also echoed in the present novel:

Una vez vi lo que voy a contar, pero antes de hacerlo debo deciros que probablemente no cuente todo lo que vi o me pierda en el camino, o deje parte para mi [sic] mismo, ya que hay cosas que no nos atrevemos a contar. (2002a: 11)

Such untrustworthy narrators signal an attempt to destabilise the reader’s perception of a reliable and homogenising force that usually holds the narrative together. By having the narrator admit that he will not be recounting events exactly as they happened, the author is presenting merely a version of the story instead of a unified and consistent account of the ‘truth’. Furthermore, this is set out in the opening paragraph and results in the reader becoming aware that it will remain relevant for the duration of the novel.

By privileging subjectivity, Ávila Laurel signals the importance of perspective which suggests that the novel is subject to multiple readings.

Nistal Rosique contextualises the narrator in this novel: ‘Como en obras anteriores de Ávila, el narrador deja de ser el instrumento objetivo que utiliza el autor para contar en tercera persona lo que sucede, y se convierte en un personaje que pasa a dar su propia opinión en primera persona’ (2008: 114-15). This subjective first-person narrative voice signifies ownership of the opinions expressed in the novel. In a sense, the first-person’s active statements render social criticism more compelling. Similar to *Cuentos crudos*, *Nadie tiene buena fama en este país* contains a critical perspective on issues such as the tension between tradition and modernity, the financial implications of the oil industry, international adoption and the social position of women. All of these topics go against the standardising discourse of the current administration which seeks to promote a unified and progressive democratic country, with a homogenous sense of national identity.¹²⁸

(Neo)Colonial Economy

The narrator reminds the reader that it was colonisation which first encouraged the population to abandon the traditional way of life:

En el Malabo de hoy se está tan lejos de la finca que nadie piensa en los baños fríos matinales. Y no es que no tuviéramos el bosque a dos metros de la casa sino que hace tiempo que este lugar es ciudad, y en las ciudades se venden pollos congelados y latas de tomate. Eso empezó cuando este lugar se llamaba Clarence y los bubis se acercaban a los ingleses negreros para venderles aceite de palma y ñames, a cambio de trozos de hierro que no valían nada [...]. En Malabo, todo el mundo cree que si no fuera por los pollos congelados de los negreros, perdón, de los comerciantes, nadie viviría. (2002a: 15)

The historical details of colonisation and its relation to the present-day situation are expressed in a unique way. The parapraxis of ‘negreros’ and ‘comerciantes’ clearly demonstrates that the colonial relationship has been replaced by a neo-colonial model and that both are sustained by trade. The tension between the traditional way of life and the perpetuated ‘myth’ of modernity is revealed as an illusion by the narrator:

¹²⁸ See <http://www.guinea-ecuatorial.gq> [accessed June 17, 2009] for examples of the national discourse on issues of development, healthcare, human rights, education and conservation.

Dicen que no hay trabajo y hablan de paro, como si hubieran estado alguna vez empleados en algo. Paro. No quieren reconocer que cada habitante de Malabo tiene el bosque a doscientos metros y para obtener una cosecha de tres sacos de malanga y siete racimos de plátanos no necesitan abonos, ni carretillas, ni rastrillos. (2002a: 67)

The common belief that Equatorial Guineans are missing out on jobs is challenged by the suggestion that it has always been this way. The failure of the population to recognise that it is not participating in the hegemonic discourse is testament to the effectiveness of that discourse. Igor Cusack discusses the issue of forced nationalism by the ruling élite in Chapter Five of his doctoral thesis. It is evident that this sense of nation or unified identity is fictionally represented in this novel. Here, Ávila Laurel is signalling that there is no need to partake in the illusion of national unity and that the traditional way of life was more fruitful.

Lewis has stated that the population is experiencing the ‘trickle-down effects of the culture of oil and technological progress’ (2007: 193). The dependence on this money is causing the population’s failure to support itself which, in turn, promotes a ‘mentality of underdevelopment and dependency’ (2007: 193). When Engracia, the female protagonist arrives in Bata, she is involved in a situational interaction with a soldier:

¿Vienes de Malabo?

– Sí;

– Vienes de donde hay dinero. Hemos oído que ya se vive en Malabo; no como nosotros, que en tres días no vemos quinientos. ¿Qué quieres? [...].

– Ay, hermanos míos; el dinero del petróleo no es de todos.

– ¡Kie señora! No hemos hablado del dinero del petróleo. Así cambiáis las cosas. Hemos hablado del dinero, pero no del petróleo. No hacemos política. (2002a: 36)

The association of Malabo with money is a distinguishing stereotype that reveals the soldier’s perception that those who come from Malabo are wealthy. At the first mention of oil, the soldier claims that he does not want to engage in a political debate and the controversial link between money and oil prevents the discussion from taking place. Furthermore, this passage confirms that the administration is watchful when it comes to issues related to the exploitation of oil. By refusing to discuss this topic, the soldier demonstrates the hegemonic discourse of the government which actively discourages the population from engaging with political issues. At the same time, the soldier’s perception of Malabo highlights the power of stereotypes operating within the

country and the extent to which a person can be identified as wealthy because of where he/she lives.

This situational interaction relates to the author's expression of identity as Engracia is labelled as a result of her interaction with the Other. During this exchange, the protagonist bridges two different geographic locations and demonstrates the perceived economic imbalance and its effect on identification. More important still is the disassociation between money and politics. These are factors which influence the situational interaction and clearly demonstrate how they can influence the expression of identity.

Heterogeneity and the Female Protagonist

Another characteristic of Ávila Laurel's writing evidenced in this passage is the removal of the male protagonist from the centre of the action. It has already been stated that the author tends to give precedence to female characters. Lewis accurately observes: 'in most of Ávila Laurel's works husbands play a secondary role as the women take centre stage and are central to his stories' (2007: 192). The placement of a female protagonist at the core of the novel is another way of offering an alternative to the dominant format of strictly male protagonists in Equatorial Guinean fiction.

The use of these characters allows also for the representation of the female situation in Equatorial Guinea. Engracia is married to Pepe who is her first husband's brother. The reader is told that, in the Fang tradition, when a man dies it is the responsibility of his brother to take care of his family (2002a: 75).¹²⁹ Already objectified, Engracia is subjected to less than ideal treatment from her new husband and the story follows her to Bata where her daughter is subsequently abducted.

The kidnapping highlights the contentious issue of adoption as Engracia's daughter was taken by a relative in order to be given to a French family. The narrator comments:

Un fenómeno que acaparará mucha atención en la corriente de opinión de todo el mundo es el de la adopción. La mayoría de los habitantes de la Europa de hoy tienen suficientes medios para criar a más de dos hijos. Pero a medida que mejora el nivel de

¹²⁹ The broader position of women in Equatorial Guinean society is not the focus of the argument. It is being signalled here as a point of interest for the reader. In the conclusion to this dissertation, the representation of tribal practices and the position of women are included in the potential areas for future research.

vida, disminuyen los índices de natalidad y las escuelas se vacían, cuando las casas de anciano están a rebosar [...]. Hay que tener hijos, pero sin sentirlos. (2002a: 58-9)

The author devotes several pages to this topic which indicates the significance he attributes to it. The debate surrounding 'third world' adoption is not entirely unknown to the reader. However, the narrator raises specifically the problems faced by relatives and the impact of adoption on identity. Lewis reflects on the issues raised in the novel:

The hypocrisy of the adoption phenomenon is revealed by the fact that the parents and relatives of the children the Europeans want to adopt are not permitted to immigrate to the countries sponsoring the adoptions, and in order to relocate the children, blood relatives often have to resort to desperate measures to communicate and cross boundaries [...]. This is a moral aspect of adoption that is rarely considered. Is there to be a total rupture with the past on the part of adopted children? Does the new identity totally eradicate the old? Is it the duty of the so-called Third World to populate aging, sterile Western societies? (2007: 194-95)

It is evident from this passage that Ávila Laurel only scratches the surface of this highly complex issue. Indeed, kidnapping also raises questions of human trafficking and the legality of the adoptions which take place. The question of the impact on identity of such issues is one that is emerging in the field of Afro-European studies.¹³⁰

This novel, like the others discussed in this chapter, offers a wide range of both topics and characters which challenge the expectations of the reader. Malabo and Bata offer a contrast to the countryside which is emblematic of traditional ways of life. Through the female protagonist, the author includes cultural details of the Fang traditions while, at the same time, drawing attention to the position of women within Equatorial Guinean society as a whole. The introduction of an unreliable first-person narrator signals the subjectivity of the text. By discussing economic issues related to the exploitation of oil, coupled with the political hegemonic discourse, the author promotes a re-evaluation of the standardising practices of the government. Finally, the inclusion of 'third world' adoption not only raises issues of identity, but also encourages the reader to reflect critically upon the relationship between Africa and the West, and the expectations of each which are becoming more apparent in an increasingly globalised world.

All of these issues are points of resistance against the expression of a single identity. The author makes the reader aware of potential alternatives to the expected

¹³⁰ For example, projects like Afroeuropa@s: culturas e identidades negras en europa, create a space for discussion and strive to interrogate issues of identity. See <http://www.afroeuropa.eu> [accessed June 16, 2009].

norms and effectively communicates this message through the situational interactions he presents. In this chapter, the particular ways in which Ávila Laurel expresses identity in his narratives have been explored. It has been argued that his approach to identity is mirrored by the heterogeneous quality of his writing. In addition to the social engagement of his texts, he also advocates the responsibility of the author in the creation of a space for Equatorial Guinean literature. Ávila Laurel actively seeks the participation of the reader in his narratives, particularly in *El desmayo de Judas* and *Cuentos crudos*, a technique which links him to Djangany and his works which were discussed in Chapter Three. On a further stylistic note, Ávila Laurel dedicates much of his fiction to dialogue. The situational interactions between characters are expressed primarily in this way as examples of face-to-face encounters. The subjectivity of individuals, and their perception, allows for multiple interpretations and strengthens the claim that Ávila Laurel's expression of identity is founded on heterogeneity.

The imposition of a single national identity, one that is promulgated above all by the current government, is rejected both directly and indirectly by the author and by the emphasis on difference in his writing. One only has to consider the range of locations (Valencia, Mbini, Malabo, Bata and Annobón), together with the varied background of his protagonists, to get a sense of how this author's situational interactions reflect heterogeneity. One final point can be made regarding the relationship between the individual and the collective. Ávila Laurel represents a broad cross section of individuals who express their identity through situational interactions. These encounters capture the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the collective. His individual and local interactions can therefore symbolise heterogeneity of the larger population.

CHAPTER SIX

HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY IN JOAQUÍN MBOMIO BACHENG

Of the authors included in this dissertation, he is the only one who has been directly persecuted by Macías' dictatorship and has witnessed first-hand the political transition to the new regime, as well as the subsequent impact it has had on the population.¹³¹

Ndong-Bidyogo and Ngom explain:

Joaquín Mbomio sufrió en carne propia la persecución nguemista durante la dictadura de Francisco Macías. El 24 de marzo de 1978, fue detenido por la policía política y acusado de alta traición. Después de haber sido presentado y denunciado públicamente en un mitin revolucionario como «estudiante traidor», ingresó en la «Cárcel Modelo» de Bata. Luego, fue condenado a trabajos forzados en las plantaciones de cacao de la isla de Bioko. Fue liberado el 10 de agosto de 1979 tras el «Golpe de Libertad» del 3 de agosto del mismo año, e indultado por las nuevas autoridades del país. (2000: 456)

Raised in Equatorial Guinea, both of his novels were published by the Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano and express identity as a product of interaction. Arguably, he is a contemporary writer who rests on the cusp between the previous generation of authors and those termed *neo-independentistas*.¹³² Furthermore, his literary formation took root in Equatorial Guinea and his writing represents a deeply reflective tendency, specifically with regard to the expression of identity.

Two novels, *El párroco de Niefang* (1996) and *Huellas bajo tierra* (1998), will be examined here to show how Bacheng frames identity as intrinsically 'hybrid', a result of being fed by both European (Spanish) and African cultural streams. Following a theoretical discussion of hybridity and relevant information pertaining to this author, it will be argued that these texts offer a reaction to the repressive dictatorships which have plagued the country since Independence in 1968. Moreover, the discussion will touch upon the relationship between the individual and the collective, as well as historical and political circumstances which affect the expression of identity as a whole.

¹³¹ Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng was born in Bisobinam-Somo, in the district of Niefang on the mainland of Río Muni. He studied at the Escuela Nacional 'Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra' before pursuing higher education in France (Ndongo-Bidyogo and Ngom, 2000: 456-457). After completing his studies abroad, he returned to Malabo in 1988 where he remained until 1990 when he went into exile in France and later in Switzerland (Lewis, 2007: 157).

¹³² It should be noted that Djangany includes Bacheng in his discussion of the generation of *neo-independentistas* (2010: 19-80).

In addition to novels, Bacheng has written critical essays on contemporary Equatorial Guinean writers. In much the same vein as Ávila Laurel or Djangany, Bacheng closely examines the cultural inheritance felt by the contemporary subject and the responsibility of the author. In his preface to *El párroco de Niefang*, for example, he explains:

Esta fase crítica se caracteriza en el marco cultural por la acción de intelectuales guineanos que, con medios materiales muy limitados, defienden y protegen el patrimonio cultural que define hoy la identidad guineana, forjada por varios siglos de intercambio entre la tradición africana y los valores hispánicos, ante la agresión que representa la brusca penetración política y económica de la francofonía en el espacio guineoecuatoriano. Consideramos que los valores básicos que integran la identidad guineana pueden ser liquidados, como fue el caso de Filipinas con los anglosajones, ante los esfuerzos desplegados por el gobierno francés en su incansable labor de desplazar no sólo a España, sino también a toda la cultura hispánica, en el único territorio hispanoparlante de África negra. (1996: 7)

The valorisation of the Hispanic heritage forms the basis for the vision of a hybridised identity which he presents in his novels. This marriage of Hispanic and African cultures is seen as a feature which distinguishes Equatorial Guinea from other African countries.

The approach to the expression of identity in Bacheng's works hinges on a theoretical understanding of hybridity. Close examination of the situational interactions in his novels reveals the expression of a telescopic identity which engages with the multifaceted nature of Equatorial Guinea as represented in fiction. Unlike Ávila Laurel, who emphasises the heterogeneity of identity expression, Bacheng is more specific regarding the facets of identity which he considers to be hybrid. The binary oppositions identified by Bacheng, such as Europe and Africa, Catholicism and Tradition, are articulated so that the reader can clearly see the correlation between the two as well as the interstitial space that exists between them.¹³³ Whereas Ávila Laurel presents a deliberately heterogeneous approach, Bacheng's characters precisely reflect the cultural influences that have shaped their identity. Therefore, the theoretical notion of hybridity is better suited to the analysis of his texts.

There have been several attempts to define this term. Ashcroft et al. describe hybridity as 'the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization' (1998: 118). Although hybridity is widely employed in the field of

¹³³ It is appropriate in this chapter to include a discussion of binary oppositions. As outlined in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the rejection of binary oppositions is central to poststructuralist thought. The additional theoretical understanding of hybridity is adopted to compliment the systematic examination of situational interactions which has been founded on social theory.

postcolonial studies, it is not exclusively restricted to that context. In their preface to *L'émigration: le retour* (1999), Duroux and Montandon describe the often paradoxical implications of 'the return' after a period of exile. They write:

L'un des paradoxes du retour de l'émigré est que celui qui rentre n'est plus le même que celui qui était parti, et qu'il rentre dans un pays qui lui-même a changé entre-temps [...]. Paradoxe du natif devenu étranger en son propre pays, plus étranger encore que d'autres, puisque la question de l'identité fondamentale est posée. (1999: 5)

The return to the native country or, in some cases, the village of birth, is an act which symbolises the reconsideration of identity. Returning to one's roots and being surrounded by what was once familiar undoubtedly highlights the parts of the self that have developed or changed since the departure. As Andrew Smith explains, the departure is not restricted to a physical displacement:

So "hybridity" can become a term *not* for the mixing of once separate and self-contained cultural traditions, but rather for the recognition of the fact that all culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the purportedly "other", and in which the attempts of the dominant culture to close and patrol its hegemonic account are threatened by the return of minority stories and histories, and by strategies of appropriation and revaluation. (2004: 252 [*italics in original*])

The concept of a 'dominant' culture is clearly defined in the context of colonialism, which drives the imposed hegemony of the assimilated. Terence Ranger describes hybridity as: 'the cultural condition of Third World intellectuals in the West [and] is asserted to be the condition of all contemporary society' (1996: 271). This understanding of hybridity is useful as it widens out to include a 'condition of contemporary society'. While it is true that this sense of hybridity is most immediately felt by those who have been in contact with a different culture, Ranger's comment also draws attention to the fact that the use of 'hybrid' in the conception of identity is becoming increasingly more common. His view that traditional positions of power have been undermined to produce a hybridity which is the benchmark of present-day society suggests a shared experience of blurred geographic boundaries and intertwined conceptions of self.

The contemporary subject, who has either been physically displaced by, for example, studying in the West, or who has experienced 'inner-exile' through assimilation of the imposed hegemonic culture, feels removed from his or her natural

surroundings. More important still, it is the situational interactions with the Other which allow for the expression of hybridity.

Homi Bhabha is an obligatory point of reference in any discussion of hybridity as he has dedicated a substantial amount of his work to this subject. Although it will be difficult to enter into the details of his theoretical framing of the issue, there are a few key examples which illustrate his conception of the term. For Bhabha:

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 [...]. (1994: 296)

Therefore, the conceptual space the 'hybrid' inhabits is demarcated by difference. What he describes as the 'borderline experience' can be understood as that of the postcolonial subject. Furthermore, the resistance of the binary opposition implicates the hybrid as neither one nor the other. Consequently, the occupation of the space between the binary opposition is what becomes characteristic of hybridity.

All of these issues converge in Bacheng's framing of identity. For his characters, hybridity is revealed through situational interactions. Although predominantly expressed as the result of colonial education and the imposed hegemonic cultural discourse, his characters inhabit more than one cultural sphere and it is the tension between them which gives depth and shape to his expression of identity. As Bhabha explains:

Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. (1996a: 58)

The 'partial culture' will be characterised in different ways depending on the sources — education for example — that have merged to create the hybrid subject. By not seeking 'cultural supremacy or sovereignty', hybridity significantly relates to telescopic identity whereby facets can be highlighted or downplayed but are not necessarily positioned in a hierarchy.

Hybridity, as clarified by Kapchan and Turner Strong, allows scholars to 'analyze particular processes of cultural mixture and border crossing in original and insightful ways' (1999: 250). It is also important to consider that the concept of

hybridity is, like identity, overused in academic circles and, as such, risks losing precise theoretical meaning. The purpose in employing the term here is two-fold. Firstly, Bacheng stresses that there is mixing rather than heterogeneity — as seen with Ávila Laurel — so that for him, it is less a collection of individualities and more an overarching theme of hybridity. Secondly, the notion of hybridity in Bacheng's narratives manifests itself both in his characters, who are laden with a fragmented colonial inheritance, and in his style of writing.

El párroco de Niefang

El párroco de Niefang was published in 1996 and is a historical novel set in the period directly following the coup d'état in 1979. The story follows a young priest, Father Gabriel, shortly after he is released from prison. In a similar way to Maximiliano Nkogo Esono's realistic representation of Malabo in *Adjá-Adjá y otros relatos*, Bacheng provides a detailed account of the geographical area surrounding Niefang on the mainland of Río Muni. In his prologue, Anacleto Oló Mibuy (who also wrote the prologue to Nkogo Esono's book of 1994) designates *El párroco de Niefang* an example of the 'nueva narrativa nacional' (1996: 5). He highlights the religious syncretism presented in the novel (1996: 5), an issue which will be examined in light of the theoretical discourse of hybridity outlined above.

In addition to the local details depicted in this novel, the time period represents the transition from the Macías to the Obiang regime.¹³⁴ Father Gabriel's reintegration into society drives the plot in this novel, while his interactions with his parishioners, in addition to his own spiritual and emotional journey, form the basis for the expression of identity. Father Gabriel is symbolic of a large number of priests and other members of the religious community who were systematically persecuted during Macías' dictatorship.

Local and National

The author describes Niefang and the surrounding areas in great detail. The Litoral region on the west coast of Río Muni is seen as a physical representation of diversity

¹³⁴ This novel has strong autobiographical overtones. Bacheng himself was imprisoned by Macías and then released following the *golpe de la libertad* in 1979 (Bacheng: 2001).

and the descriptions can be extended to apply to other places within and outside of the country. For example:

Niefang es una de esas ciudades guineanas, pequeñas y desconcertantes, que, sin encanto aparente, subyugan y cautivan al visitante. Niefang es un mirador sobre el río Woro, como Zaragoza sobre el Ebro, como Lyon sobre el Ródano y como Sevilla sobre el Guadalquivir. (1996: 16)

The designation as ‘una de esas ciudades’ implies that it is like one of many. It is meaningful that he does not allude to other African rivers but to European ones which, in turn, refer to the cultural inheritance experienced in this region. An additional location described in this manner is Edum which is ‘uno de esos pueblos que caracterizan el espacio rural de Niefang’ (1996: 32). Again, this town is seen to possess a national quality. Although at this point the author is describing this specific area, the attributes of Edum could easily be transferred to other geographical spaces. Similarly, Bacheng employs this technique in his description of characters and this will be explored specifically in the case of Ndong.

Niefang is represented as the meeting place of two cultural communities: the Fang from the interior and the coastal population from the Litoral region. The cultural hybridity of this geographical area is subsequently embodied in Father Gabriel. This space is portrayed by the author as a place of cultural mingling which feeds into the larger discussion of hybridity. Niefang can be seen as the meeting place of distinct ethnic groups and has been shaped by different influences, including European ones. Bacheng clearly defines the relationship between Father Gabriel and Niefang which arguably allows for a similar portrayal of both the man and the space:

Centro cultural y ciudad anfibia, Niefang es todo un símbolo que marca el encuentro entrañable de dos comunidades de la estirpe riomunense. La fusión de dos civilizaciones, la playera y la continental. Porque, en esta ciudad, el fang que procede del interior viene a vestirse con la personalidad playera sin dejar de ser fang; pero también el playero originario del Litoral viene a cobrar la personalidad fang sin dejar de ser playero. De este modo, el hombre de Niefang se caracteriza también por la complejidad, a veces también por la ambigüedad de su temperamento, resultado de los dos componentes riomunenses: por una parte la flexibilidad del hombre del Litoral y por otra, la rigidez existencial del hombre del interior. Niefang es esto, una sociedad heterogénea, un universo ecléctico y por esta razón ocurren cosas muy curiosas, sucesos extraordinarios, que alteran a veces la monotonía cotidiana de este espacio rural. El padre Gabriel nació en Niefang. (1996: 19)

It is not difficult to see the parallels that exist between the depiction of Niefang and the conceptual understanding of identity. Words like ‘flexibilidad’ and ‘rigidez’ are similar to those used to discuss identity. To classify opposite ends of the spectrum as fixed and determined or fluid and changeable relates to Bacheng’s descriptions and subsequently to Father Gabriel as the personification of hybridity. Framing Niefang as ‘una de esas ciudades’, allows it to stand for many places and it can thus be interpreted as a local example of a broader issue that concerns the nation as a whole.

Hybridity

Father Gabriel exemplifies cultural hybridity and all of its inherent contradictions specifically framed in a religious context. The reader is told that black is evil and symbolic of darkness, whereas goodness is bright, white and pure. This figurative language is also applied to the protagonist who focuses on the contrast between his skin and his cassock and consequently feels a strange sensation:

[D]ecía que el mal era lo negro, lo oscuro, el mal simbolizaba el mundo de las tinieblas. En tanto que el bien, proseguía el padre teólogo, era lo luminoso, lo blanco, lo puro. El bien simbolizaba 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. (1996: 28-29)

Just as Niefang represents the symbiosis of different backgrounds, Father Gabriel is the union of both indigenous and European cultures through religion. His formation as a priest has been based on interaction with a European Other and has had a significant impact on the ways in which his identity manifests itself. It can be argued that Father Gabriel does not belong to either side’s conception of the Other, that is to say, the African or the European. This is an example of what Simon During describes as “self-othering” which is achieved by ‘constructing or finding a self as another or by identification with others’ (1994: 47). The protagonist does this in an attempt to negotiate his own identity, appropriating elements from both sides, neither of which he feels fully a part of. Having been educated abroad, Father Gabriel has gained what Edward Said describes as a ‘double perspective that never sees things in isolation’ (1996: 60).

This hybridity of European/Catholic and indigenous traditions and practices is a recurrent theme throughout the novel. The character of Ndong is employed by the

author to emphasise the cultural intersection. In terms that recall the description of geographic locations, Ndong is presented as ‘uno de esos jóvenes que ambula hoy por todo Guinea’ (1996: 53). Ndong can therefore be perceived as one of many, a representative of a larger population. The situational interaction between Ndong and Father Gabriel carries great significance in the novel, their dialogue illustrating a fundamental divergence in perspective between the Catholic Church and traditional indigenous value systems. The initial conversation between the two men exemplifies the contrast between Father Gabriel’s religious indoctrination and the deterministic views of Ndong:

- Hola, Ndong. Parece que has tenido mucha suerte hoy – dijo al pueblerino al tiempo que bajaba del coche –.
- Es para ti, padre, – replicó el mozo –. Es la primera vez que encuentro un jabalí en mis trampas, y da la casualidad de que llegas hoy.
- Debemos deducir, pues, que esto es regalo de Dios – apuntó el religioso ayudando al campesino a acomodar la pieza en el coche –.
- Regalo de Dios o de Satanás, poco importa, – observó Ndong con su habitual indiferencia ante la religión –. Lo cierto es que este jabalí ha caído en el mejor momento, porque hemos preparado una gran fiesta para celebrar tu libertad.
- Oye, Ndong, – exclamó el sacerdote con una gran sonrisa –: ¿tú cuándo te decidirás a entrar en la casa de Dios? Lo que más te gusta es ir todos los sábados a bailar en la casa del pueblo.
- Verás, padre, – habló Ndong con gravedad –: todos nacemos con un signo en la cara, por eso es normal y natural para mí y para los demás que yo sea un buen cazador del bosque y un bebedor empedernido de malamba. Por eso es normal, digo yo, que tú lleses lentes y hables de Dios con tanta seguridad y certeza como si lo hubieras visto con tus propios ojos.
- [...]
- Exacto, decía Ndong, – un gesto humano y sencillo para que todos seamos felices, padre; para que no haya más guerras ni peleas, para que no haya matanzas, ni asesinatos ni detenciones; un gesto humano, padre, para que unos cuantos no vuelvan a ejercer su tiranía sobre los demás, para que podamos vivir en paz y con dignidad en nuestros poblados; un simple gesto, para que nos dejen libres, que tú puedas ejercer libremente tu sagrado ministerio y para que yo pueda vivir tranquilamente mi existencia pagana sin ofender ni molestar a nadie. (1996: 45-46)

Following this conversation, Father Gabriel is left feeling isolated from his own people. He does not understand how they can be content in the absence of God and this causes him to question elements of his own religious identity. Ndong makes it explicitly clear that Father Gabriel is not like him and points out that it is because he is good and pure (1996: 47). Lewis notes that ‘like others educated in the Western tradition, Gabriel suffers from cultural alienation’ (2007: 161):

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 irremediablemente a vivir los cien años de soledad. (1996: 71)

The juxtaposition revealed through the situational interaction, both with Ndong and with Father Gabriel's people, underlines the differences between them. Consequently, this exchange illuminates Father Gabriel's telescopic identity and the position he occupies between two cultures.

Hybrid Faith

Religion has particularly complicated connotations when examined from a postcolonial perspective. Catholicism in Equatorial Guinea is inseparable from colonialism and is often explored in the context of education. Avome Mba explains the strong connection between religion and the colonial project:

Tras largos años en tierras guineoecuatorianas, la acción misionera española ha dejado una huella imborrable en la forma de ser del guineano. Dicha acción tenía por objetivo evangelizar y "civilizar"; de ahí la profunda religiosidad que se respira en la obra. La Iglesia, encarnada por el padre Gabriel, no sólo se interesa por las almas, sino que se dedica también a actividades encaminadas al desarrollo de la sanidad y de la cultura hispana en Guinea Ecuatorial. (1999: 81)

Because religion was an integral part of the colonisation process, it was often associated with other pursuits also. Father Gabriel not only represents the culmination of religious teachings, but also symbolises the diversity of the efforts which were made in the name of 'civilisation'. His telescopic identity is further nuanced when the reader learns that he has a lover, María Soledad, who is carrying his child. Ndong's statement that Father Gabriel is too 'pure' to feel connected to his people needs to be nuanced as his sin, in fact, brings him closer to his community. His religious identity, no matter how tarnished or compromised, is necessary for, without it, the people of his country will not find hope. The situational interaction with María Soledad reveals to what extent Father Gabriel's religious identity is compromised:

¿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 como lo hacía mi abuelo...los espíritus...no sé, no se [sic] lo que quiero... (1996: 78-79)

During this exchange, María Soledad becomes the voice of reason who tells Father Gabriel that his hybrid nature will help him to reach his people:

Tú no debes abandonar el sacerdocio, porque si lo haces, yo no volveré a verte. 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. Sólo le queda la esperanza y el consuelo de su fe cristiana y su tradición africana. (1996: 79)

The designation of religious syncretism which is outlined in the prologue to the novel is echoed by Avome Mba in her article: 'Religiosidad, independencia y conflictos culturales' (1999: 79). This idea is expressed on many levels, but particularly as it relates to Father Gabriel's hybrid identity. Furthermore, his 'crisis' of faith can be extended to the larger population. Avome Mba explains: 'En la obra, la práctica del cristianismo no se percibe como una sumisión de los personajes a un orden institucional establecido' (1999: 80). That is to say, the Catholic faith is not synonymous with adhering to the dominant cultural discourse. This implies that the population, like Father Gabriel, have facets of identity shaped by both European religious education and traditional practices which do not necessarily coincide.

It has been argued here that the characteristics of particular spaces and people are presented by the author to allow them to be extended to the broader context. The hybridity inherent in Niefang is embodied by Father Gabriel who must accept his religious identity as a symbol of hope for the population and is one example of how Bacheng engages with the expression of identity in this novel. Furthermore, the situational interactions between characters underpin his expression of hybrid identity.

Hybridity and the Fantastic

An attempt is made to explore the contrasting facets of Father Gabriel's identity through an encounter he has with Ndong. The interaction between the two men is overshadowed when Ndong becomes possessed by the spirit of the priest's deceased friend, Patricio. Ndong acts as the intermediary between two worlds, 'entre el mundo de los muertos y el de los vivos, mensajero y portavoz de los ancestros' (1996: 48). The telescopic mediation between these binary oppositions is visible during the interaction.

The tension between reality and fantasy, European religion and tradition, exposes facets of Father Gabriel's identity:

- ¡Que se acerque el padre Gabriel! – pidió el espíritu. [...]
- ¡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. (1996: 50)

Father Gabriel is clearly searching for answers and proof of the Christian faith from a source firmly rooted in his ancestral traditions. As Carrasco Gonzáles points out: 'Sirve también la novela para dibujar la naturalidad con que conviven magia y religión' (1997: 301). His attempt to reconcile the two dominant parts of his identity only further emphasises that it is fundamentally hybrid.

The act of being possessed by the spirit of Patricio adds another dimension to this novel. Neither Nkogo Esono nor Ávila Laurel presents overtly fantastic scenes in their texts. This leaves only a connection with Djangany who employs the fantastic to relate the individual to the collective and to ancestors. This process draws attention to the interstitial space between reality and fiction. In a similar way, Bacheng utilises traditional practices to invoke the spirit of Patricio so that he can be involved in a situational interaction with Father Gabriel. This dialogue is significant for an understanding of the telescopic expression of identity because it is through his engagement with the spirit that he reveals that he is indeed influenced by traditional practices. Therefore, the fantastic allows the author – or, in this case, authors – to fruitfully express telescopic identity while, at the same time, demonstrating that it is related to cultural rituals.

Huellas bajo tierra

Huellas bajo tierra was published in 1998. This novel contains both historical and intertextual references and follows the trajectory of Juan Ndong through a fictional diary. As observed by Marvin Lewis, the diary of Juan Ndong 'in combination with a variety of other narrative threads, provides a number of narrative perspectives that

contribute to the metafictional structure of the work' (2007: 165). In terms of narrative style, Genette et al. describe the diary as a type of writing which occupies a space between fictional and factual narrative (1990: 758). For Bacheng, this adds another layer of fiction within the novel which creates two levels of situational interaction. The first is between the reader and the text and the second is between the unidentified narrator and the diary. The actual reader can therefore be seen as twice removed from the action. This fact, coupled with a disjunction of narrative time, functions in a similar way to the anachrony of Djangany's texts. These elements will be considered, alongside issues of religion and self-interrogation, in order to explore the situational interactions presented in this novel.

The diary is presented to the reader indirectly through the introduction of a Catalan character named Girolla by an unidentified narrator. The entries are fictional testimony set in historical events and the narrative runs parallel to the political development of the country as the protagonist experiences the pre- and post-Macías periods. The only information the reader has concerning the unidentified character is that he is Equatorial Guinean. By remaining anonymous, he significantly allows his experience to be extended to that of many others, a technique that has been explored in *El párroco de Niefang*. The reader learns at the beginning of the text that the protagonist, Juan Ndong, has died in France. From this point onwards, the reader is aware of the fact that there are two narrative voices. The first is the omniscient narrator, and the second are the entries in the diary.

Hybridity and Religion

The cultural impact of colonialism is meaningfully displayed in this novel through the literary expression of hybrid identity. Catholicism was actively employed by Spain during the colonial period in Equatorial Guinea where the colonial subject received 'el pan blanco que venía del cielo, pasando por España, y que una vez recibido aseguraba la promoción social en la colonia africana' (1998: 25). Bacheng, through the interrogation of religion, reveals that the appropriation of the Catholic faith has resulted in cultural hybridity:

Porque en Guinea muchos somos católicos. Esta religión nos la impusieron los españoles durante el período colonial, pero ya la hemos hecho nuestra en Guinea con todos los colores de la cultura nacional [...]. El catolicismo en Guinea ya no es una

actitud filosófica legada de un pasado colonial, sino una cultura nacional con sus sabrosos particularismos locales. (1998: 105)

With the integration of Catholicism into the cultural fabric of the country, statements such as: ‘Éste era mi mundo, mi modelo, la familia africana, los estudios, los moldes hispánicos y la cultura católica’ (1998: 28) show that religion and Hispanic culture go hand in hand in his fictional representation of the contemporary mentality. It is important to note that, in Bacheng’s illustration of religion and cultural hybridity, the imposed colonial model does not supersede the traditional one. In fact, the two seem to coexist without a sense of hierarchy. Catholic religion was often accommodated by the pre-existing model of traditional beliefs. For example:

Mba era buen cristiano, pero Cristo le había parecido siempre un ser extraño, ajeno a su mundo [...]. Lo hacía por respeto y por la profunda devoción que profesaba a todo ser que se relacionaba con el universo celeste y también con el mundo ancestral. (1998: 17)

The expression of Mba’s identity in this passage emphasises both Western religion and traditional African values. The facets of his telescopic identity, as they pertain to religion, are couched in devotion and not necessarily in a belief in God. The world of the ancestors still remains an important part of the belief system. Religion is therefore one arena in which identity is clearly expressed as hybrid. Further clarification of this point is made when Bacheng writes:

A pesar de los doscientos años de intercambio cultural aquellas gentes seguían conservando su propia personalidad, sus peculiaridades y sus costumbres que en nada se asemejaban al comportamiento de los de la Península. (1998: 45)

This quote illustrates that, although colonialism succeeded in imposing certain cultural traditions, in other areas, Equatorial Guineans still retain their own identity. Bacheng’s expression of identity in his novels thus includes the dual recognition of both traditional and imposed cultural values. Furthermore, it can be argued that the telescopic extension of identity between the binary opposition of European and African is visible in the fictional expression of the contemporary subject.

The Individual and the Collective

As he does in *El párroco de Niefang*, Bacheng explores in *Huellas bajo tierra* the relationship between the individual and the collective. The subtle difference is that, in

the latter, this is not achieved through universalising discourse, but rather through the relation of the individual to his ancestors. The self is negated in order to underline this point, as Ndong states: ‘Mi ente personal no existía. Yo era de mi tribu, yo pertenecía a mi familia y punto’ (1998: 100). His tribal association directly links him to a collective identity shared by all those in his family. The invocation of the Spanish reference to Lázaro also alludes to the Hispanic facet of his identity. In the process of defining the same by the exclusion of the Other, Ndong states:

Yo no soy un pobre Lázaro, yo soy de este mundo, soy un hombre vivo, u hombre rico porque siempre vivo junto a mi pueblo, con mis ancestros. Donde estoy allí están ellos, porque soy un masa-hombre, soy un pueblo, una tribu, todo un clan. Esto soy yo. (1998: 106)

This affirmation of his personal identity thus anchors him in an ancestral tradition.

Juan Ndong reinforces this sentiment when he discusses his name, underlining the importance of his ancestors and highlighting his place within a long family tradition: ‘Antes que yo, otros han llevado el nombre que llevo hoy. Ahora a mí me toca honrarlo. Yo sólo soy un eslabón más en esta larga cadena ancestral, pero al mismo tiempo soy también el que dirige y decide la suerte de ésta’ (1998: 106). His ancestral identity significantly relates to how he defines himself. Djangany evokes similar sentiments in *Cenizas de kalabó y termes* and *Autorretrato con un infiel*, confirming that ancestral traditions are considered by both authors to be a key component in the expression of identity.

Situational Interactions

A large section of the diary is dedicated to Juan Ndong’s imprisonment. Having been incarcerated himself during Macías’ regime, Bacheng uses Ndong’s prison sentence as a metaphor for the entire country during that time.¹³⁵ The young Ndong states that an Equatorial Guinean learns many things while in prison because it is a symbolic university of pain, suffering and death:

¹³⁵ At this point, it may be possible to suggest that this comment from the unidentified character carries autobiographical weight. Bacheng has written elsewhere about his own imprisonment in Black Beach prison in 1978, and aside from being chronologically similar to the fictional experiences of Juan Ndong, this diary, and the subsequent questions of identity it raises, can be linked to the author’s own personal experiences (2001: np).

La cárcel guineana lo es todo; una eterna huella bajo tierra, un río de sangre, una selva salvaje, un terreno de caza, una cadena de esclavos, un matadero de inocentes, un altar de sacrificios, una jaula donde los hombres son presos y las bestias van libres. Pero la cárcel guineana es ante todo y sobre todo la residencia privilegiada reservada para todos los guineanos, excepto para aquellos hombres inevitables que confirman la regla en toda sociedad de instinto bestial. En la cárcel guineana se aprende mucho. Allí nace de nuevo el guineano: crece, vive, llora, se confiesa y por fin muere. La cárcel es la única y verdadera mansión construida en Guinea desde que este país inició su andadura por la senda de la libertad. De boca de guineano esta gran mansión recibe el nombre de “Universidad”. Allí se aprende la ciencia del mal que corroe nuestra sociedad. Allí aprendí a sufrir en silencio la eterna agonía de mi pueblo cautivo. (1998: 58-59)

The designation of the prison as an extended metaphor for the country is signalled by Lewis as ‘an effort to demonstrate the degree to which lessons in evil are being taught and internalized by the people’ (2007: 172). The pivotal interaction in the text is an extensive exchange which occurs inside the prison between the three characters who occupy neighbouring cells: Father Gabriel, Patricio who is a young intellectual, and Nsue, a coffee farmer who voted against Macías in the elections. The situational interaction presented by these three men is expressed through a series of questions which reveal each of them as representatives of a larger group. Lewis rightly notes: ‘While these questions are, for the most part, rhetorical, they point out the distance that exists between Europe and its African colonies. A fundamental questioning of identity runs throughout *Underground Footprints*’ (Lewis 2007: 172). The facets of identity which are highlighted through their interactions convey the broader comments the author is making about Equatorial Guineans as a collective community.

It is not a coincidence that Father Gabriel appears as an intertextual reference in this novel. The link between the two novels is revealed to the reader when he/she learns that this scene takes place prior to the events depicted in *El párroco de Niefang*. This allows the reader to see a chronology in Bacheng’s writing and helps him/her to situate the events which take place in the diary. This scene acts as a reference point which reconciles the difference between the two temporal perspectives of the text: the time period of the diary and the ‘present’ day in France. Furthermore, the discussion between the three men touches on many vital issues relevant to Equatorial Guinean society, for example, religion and secularism, communism and democracy. It is argued that each of these three men represents the types of people who were imprisoned during Macías’ regime. The religious, the intellectual and the average man are all identified as

subversive and show the arbitrary nature of the convictions. Moreover, it presents the reader with a carefully selected cross section of the population.

During the conversation, Father Gabriel and Patricio have extensive philosophical and religious debates while Nsue, who represents the status quo, offers a cautionary comment:

¿os habéis preguntado lo que desea vuestro pueblo? Nosotros los del pueblo ya no os reconocemos. Los niños que habéis ido al extranjero a estudiar ya no os identificáis con vuestro propio pueblo; habláis de comunismo y de cristianismo, ¿y quién defiende nuestras tradiciones?, ¿Quién habla de nuestra cultura africana? (1998: 69-70)

Nsue's remarks represent a large proportion of the population. He has spent his life dedicated to his ancestors, raising a family and working hard, only to be imprisoned for voting for the wrong political candidate. His question also offers an explanation for Father Gabriel's feelings of isolation in *El párroco de Niefang* as he cannot reconcile his European education with his ancestral traditions. In this conversation, it is noted that Spanish or European philosophy cannot be employed to decipher an African reality: 'Pero aquí, padre mío, aquí en África, aquí en el corazón de la selva, la filosofía del ilustre español no nos sirve para descifrar nuestra realidad' (1998: 75). This is an important comment to bear in mind, given the context of this dissertation, as it appeals for a carefully balanced approach to the expression of identity.

Self-Interrogation

All of these questions cause Juan Ndong to reflect upon his identity. He asks himself: '¿yo quién era? Un guineano. ¿Y qué es un guineano? ¿Cómo se puede definir lo que es un guineano?' (1998: 71). These are the fundamental preoccupations explored in the text. As Juan Ndong thinks about the two cultural streams, the colonial and the traditional, which feed into his own identity, the reader becomes increasingly aware that these important issues are being signalled by the author.

These doubts are quickly mirrored by the unidentified narrator. After reading the diary, he is plagued with questions concerning his own identity. He states that he identifies with Juan Ndong to such an extent that he feels like he was reading his own biography:

Con estos nuevos datos en mi carpeta nacieron nuevos interrogantes en mi mente; la vida de este joven guineano intrigaba mi espíritu. Yo hubiera podido decir que me

identificaba con Juan Ndong a tal punto que me parecía estar leyendo mi propia biografía. (1998: 99)

This passage relays the only sense of personal reflection the reader receives from the unidentified narrator. He describes the diary as Juan Ndong having a profound dialogue with himself (1998: 99). This comment clarifies the structure of the novel as the diary provides the perfect medium for this form of introspective self-interrogation. The act of reading as a catalyst for the expression of identity reveals a link between this text and Djangany's short story 'Todo llega con las olas del mar'. Here, the narrator goes through a similar process as Mbo Abeso following his reading of *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*. In both cases, reading facilitates the expression of personal identity for the characters.

The final section of the diary is presented as a letter to a woman named Christine. Juan Ndong outlines all of the difficulties of their relationship in terms that can be applied to the broader cultural exchange between Africa and Europe. He describes their union:

Por eso, nuestras relaciones nunca pudieron ser íntimas a pesar del gran afecto que hay entre los dos; nuestra unión fue ante todo un duelo entre dos identidades; cada cual demostraba que su cultura era la mejor. (1998: 104)

In the final paragraphs of the novel, the narrator has a moment of silence for his fallen countryman. Since he was in France illegally when he died, it would be impossible for him to receive a proper burial. For this reason, the narrator and the Frenchman who discovered him take it upon themselves to bury him underneath a Ceiba tree, a symbol of liberty: a poignant moment given that Juan Ndong travelled to France to encounter freedom and to finally be at peace. The reader is left with the ultimate impression of solidarity which exists between Equatorial Guineans. Furthermore, the reaction from the narrator demonstrates the power of the shared experience.

Both of these novels represent telescopic identity, albeit in noticeably different ways. The theoretical discussion of hybridity at the beginning of this chapter allows for a differentiation between Bacheng's conception of identity and that of Ávila Laurel. It also provides the basis for examining the situational interactions presented in the respective novels. The key concepts surrounding the discussion of hybridity, as well as situational interactions with the Other, have been shown to be integrated in the discussion of identity expression.

In *El párroco de Niefang*, the focus on the individual, as well as local spaces, allows for a broader extension to the collective and the national. The hybridity embodied by Father Gabriel reflects the diversity attributed to the physical space of Niefang. Furthermore, the situational interactions between Father Gabriel and the members of his parish and his lover reveal a telescopic expression of his hybrid identity. This draws attention to the tensions between binary oppositions, for example Catholic and traditional. Through his interaction with his beloved María, it becomes evident that Father Gabriel's hybrid identity is essential in order for him to serve his people. The association with the fantastic is a further illustration of the hybrid understanding of identity. As Father Gabriel engages with the spiritual world, he reveals that he is shaped by both European and African cultural norms.

Huellas bajo tierra is presented as a diary in which Juan Ndong details his life during the transition from the Macías to the Obiang regime. Although this narrative takes place before *El párroco de Niefang*, Bacheng includes intertextual references which link both novels. Framing the text as a diary allows for a unique situational interaction between reader and text which is reminiscent of the technique employed by Djangany discussed in Chapter Three. While hybridity of religion is of key importance in this novel, so too is the individual's relationship to the collective. The situational interactions, particularly those which take place while Juan Ndong is in prison, illustrate the hybrid nature of identity. The unidentified narrator occupies the space between the fictional diary and the reader. It is through him that Bacheng demonstrates the self-interrogation often associated with the exploration of identity.

One of the central observations made in this chapter concerns the extension of the personal experiences of these characters to the larger population. Bacheng has erected a palpably realistic stage on which to set his characters in motion. Both novels contrast European and African traditions and underline the inherent hybridity of the contemporary subject. To the reader familiar with Equatorial Guinea, the detailed descriptions of geographical areas and political regime tie the fictional characters to a historical past. The techniques employed by Bacheng demonstrate the expression of telescopic identity which questions the boundaries between the individual and the collective.

CONCLUSION

The consideration of Equatorial Guinea as an active participant in the expression of identity in Spanish-language literature is, as this dissertation has suggested, relatively recent and is undoubtedly worthy of more scholarly attention. It has not been taken for granted that the reader is familiar with Equatorial Guinea given that literary studies in Spanish remain focused predominantly on Spain and Latin America. There is clear evidence — much of it referred to in this dissertation — that the research being carried out in this field are increasing in volume and developing in terms of content by moving away from introductory and ‘minority’ designations towards more rigorous critical study.¹³⁶ Consequently, this will aid in establishing a place for Equatorial Guinean literary studies within the larger field of Hispanic studies.

The expression of identity emerged as a fruitful point of departure to examine contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature. It was felt that a potentially productive critical approach to the country’s contemporary narrative would be to examine how the issue of identity expression, in its various modalities, was handled by a select group of writers. This dissertation views identity primarily as the product of social interaction.

The theoretical implications of this endeavour led me to a wide-ranging discussion of different ways in which the expression of identity has been both defined and explored. A justified approach to a corpus of contemporary narrative works has been offered in the various chapters of this dissertation. The identification of situational interactions as a key component in the understanding of identity expression has helped to structure my critical approach to the subject. It is accepted that there are certain limitations to this theoretical framework and that by restricting the focus to situational interactions, not all threads of investigation could be effectively accommodated.

The symbolic interactionist frame firmly grounds the literary analysis in the understanding of identity as the product of situational interactions. Concentration on one aspect of these texts has allowed for a clear context in which to consider the corpus as a whole and allows similarities and differences to emerge between the authors’ expression of identity. The development of a *telescopic* understanding of identity has

¹³⁶ Compelling evidence of this increased critical attention is supported by the number of participants in the international conference of Afro-Hispanic literary studies which has risen from thirty one in 2008, to seventy three in 2010. This is in addition to the presence of the Equatorial Guinean writers themselves.

permitted me to demonstrate these differences and is a conceptual tool that has underpinned my approach to situational interactions.

The overarching research question I have sought to address is: *How do contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors express identity in their respective texts?* I have engaged with this question through an examination of the situational interactions presented in the corpus of primary texts. Further consideration has been given to the relationship between the individual and the collective as well as to the notions of *agency* and *self*. A key differentiation between poststructuralists and social theorists' conception of agency was highlighted in Chapter Two where the former views agency in terms of the act of expressing the self and the latter conceives of agency in terms of one's actions in the world. In light of this crucial distinction, the evidence presented in this dissertation is in agreement with social theory.

Chapter Three considered the work of José Fernando Siale Djangany. His use of labyrinthine structures and multilayered narration presents a considerable challenge, even to a reader who is familiar with Equatorial Guinean literature. It is argued in this chapter that Djangany's use of anachrony and the encoding of information solicit active participation from his reader. His approach to identity expression is embodied in the elusiveness of his texts. Unreliable narrators, differences in perspective, the use of intertextuality, metafiction and the fantastic, all contribute to the overarching complexity of his work. Through the consideration of the situational interactions presented in Djangany's texts, it has been determined that there are two levels of exchange. The first relates to the characters who express their identity telescopically during situational interactions. The second level involves the reader's active engagement with the text and is engineered through the use of metafictional techniques, intertextual references and innovative narrative forms.

In Chapter Four, particular theoretical consideration was given to power relations in the expression of identity in the fiction of Maximiliano Nkogo Esono. This author's realistic depiction of daily life in Equatorial Guinea has attracted considerable attention from critics and has been stressed, among other reasons, because it invites the reader to perceive his individual characters as representatives of the collective. His characters express identity telescopically within a framework of established power dynamics in order to profit in one way or another. The situational nature of this tactic means that it is repeated on a daily basis and the advantage gained is only temporary, requiring constant re-enactment. The contradictions inherent in daily life in the country

constitute the basis for his approach to the expression of identity. His characters force the reader to acknowledge that the fulfilment of basic needs supersedes moral and ethical considerations. Nkogo Esono presents us with a cross section of individuals, some of whom exert power over others for purely selfish reasons while others voluntarily occupy subordinate positions in order to provide for their families. The author thus presents a potent criticism of corruption and nepotism in the national reality of Equatorial Guinea.

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel contributes generic variation to the corpus of primary texts. The most prolific of this contemporary generation, he offers not only quantity but also variety of content. His approach to identity expression can be classified in terms of the heterogeneity which he adopts in response to a homogenising discourse. One crucial observation made with regard to Ávila Laurel's choice of characters concerns his depiction of female protagonists, which he does, not necessarily aiming to correct a gender imbalance but rather to counteract the hegemonic masculine discourse. The fact that there is little thematic correlation between his texts when they are examined as a corpus strengthens the claim that it is, in fact, heterogeneity itself that underpins his expression of identity.

The heterogeneity of Ávila Laurel's writings invites the reader to consider alternative perspectives which is implied in the reconsideration of historical perspectives and, above all, the recognition of perceptual differences. This writer pushes the boundaries of Western conceptions of issues such as colonialism, globalisation, adoption of children and even time. Through the presentation of such a wide variety of topics and characters, he emphasises heterogeneity and expresses identity telescopically during situational interactions.

Chapter Six considered the work of Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng, the only author who was directly persecuted by Macías' regime. His imprisonment and subsequent exile undoubtedly shaped his approach to the expression of identity in his writing. Bacheng's hybrid characters are presented both as individuals and as representatives of the collective experience. As his characters interact with the Other, facets of their hybrid identities are revealed telescopically. Religion is underlined as a fundamental component of this hybridity, as is the tension between modernity and tradition. The description of local geography (an aspect shared with Nkogo Esono) can also be seen to extend to the larger nation.

In addition to denouncing the atrocities committed by Macías, Bacheng's novels also function as points of departure for the consideration of the question of Hispanic cultural inheritance through colonialism as well as the position of religion in contemporary Equatorial Guinean society. One of the only characters to cross over into both novels is Father Gabriel who represents the embodiment of this hybridity. Bacheng's novels would be valuable primary material for future research in this area.

These authors and their narrative works have been examined in order to offer critical insights into the ways in which they utilise situational interactions as sites of identity expression in their writing. A *telescopic* understanding of identity, coupled with the examination of situational interactions, has allowed for conclusions to be made with respect to each author. Although there are some sites of overlap that are apparent in more than one work – for example, the relationship between the individual and the collective – no single overarching approach to the concept can be applied systematically to every author. Instead of being bound by an ideological commitment, as seen with the previous generation for example, the *neo-independentistas* (to use Djagany's term) have expressed identity in individual ways.¹³⁷

This dissertation makes a relevant contribution to the study of contemporary Equatorial Guinean literature by joining non-traditional modes of enquiry with literary analysis to offer an innovative approach to identity. I have chosen to focus on situational interactions as the site and mechanism of identity expression in order to highlight the different ways in which the selected authors engage with the issue. Examining this corpus has revealed that certain texts are better suited to a comparative approach and this has been taken into consideration for future projects.

There are undoubtedly many possibilities for future research in this field. As previously mentioned, the authors examined in this dissertation regularly continue to publish both critical and creative works. The consideration of more recent novels may offer a deeper understanding of how identity is expressed. In addition, the scope of this project was strictly limited to narrative texts; it would be fruitful to expand the corpus of primary material to include poetry and drama. The focus of identity could be expanded to examine in detail how particular aspects are presented. Representations of ethnicity and tribal interaction would be an interesting topic to pursue, as would female

¹³⁷ The ideological commitment of the previous generation referred to here is primarily founded on a reaction to the Macías' regime. In addition to engaging with issues of exile and political activity, they were also focused on drawing attention to Equatorial Guinea and its literature.

writers and an examination of female protagonists. In the area of narrative styles and genres, connections could be established between the literary texts and African orature and the use of indigenous languages. More could also be made of the authors' choice of genre and use of *costumbrismo*, as well as metafiction and intertextuality. In addition, it would be interesting to examine the authors' personal experiences and their sites of political involvement and/or resistance. The geographical representation of Equatorial Guinea has been alluded to in this dissertation and it would be a fruitful line of enquiry to pursue in terms of its portrayal of different regions. Although postcolonial approaches have already been adopted to study Equatorial Guinean literature, there is much room for development on this front. One example would be the critical view of history presented in Ávila Laurel's writing and its relationship to postcolonial discourse. An insightful and pragmatic study into the process of publication and readership would also be welcomed in the field.

It would doubtless also be productive to examine these texts in relation to other contemporary African literatures. Although the Hispanic perspective will remain an essential component of this type of research, it would serve as a point of comparison with other contemporary literatures, for example francophone or lusophone. Similarly, there are creative works published by Moroccan and Cameroonian authors which could consolidate a corpus of Afro-Hispanic literature. In the same comparative vein, it would be interesting to investigate the burgeoning interest in connections between Equatorial Guinea and Latin America. The concept of *Hispanidad* could be developed to provide an appropriate link in this area. Due to the contemporary nature of this particular area of study, it is difficult to predict how topics of research might develop.

As this project began to take shape, it was expected that the majority of contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors would be resident in exile. It soon became apparent that this was not the case and, in fact, it was the previous generation, active in the 1980s, which was writing from outside the country. This detail has raised questions concerning censorship, government control, interference in cultural production and freedom of expression which are worthy of more attention. Furthermore, what has been discovered, in addition to the discussion surrounding the expression of identity in fiction, is a generation of authors who are actively engaged in the promotion and dissemination of their work. These authors are committed to carving out a space for their narrative and, in so doing, have become the voice of an entire generation. It will be through their efforts that issues directly affecting the future development and

cultural wellbeing of Equatorial Guinea will take shape. The authors examined in this dissertation have genuinely invested in the act of writing, a decision which provides prospective writers with an example to follow. Equally dedicated to increasing their readerships, both at home and abroad, their active participation in these endeavours will ensure that Equatorial Guinean letters continue to thrive.

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