

# **African Intellectuals and Cultural Diversity: Discussions of the Ethnic Question in Equatorial Guinea<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Given that one of the Pan African Anthropology Association's principle lines of research is the monitoring of ethnic conflicts in Africa, the contribution African intellectuals have made to the subject of cultural diversity management is a matter of great interest. The case study chosen for this paper is Equatorial Guinea, and the paper aims to provide an analysis of arguments that are raised in intellectual texts that deal with issues of identity and the country's history. The paper will look at the legacy of colonialism in regards to the empowerment and discrimination of certain ethnic groups in relation to others, it will reflect on the construction of the post-colonial state and it will consider a reading of history that runs counter to the official one, that of the country being founded upon unity, by looking at examples of the 'hijacking' of the state and certain populations within a dictatorial context.

*Keywords:* Cultural diversity, ethnicity, intellectuals, Equatorial Guinea.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Twelve years after Cameroon's independence, Mongo Beti published *Main Basse sur le Cameroun, Autopsie d'une Décolonisation* [*Cruel Hand Over Cameroon, Autopsy of a Decolonisation*], a discursive essay dealing with the independence process in the former French colony and a symbolic work generally, for it reflects, from an endogenous perspective, on themes relevant to any consideration of the independence process and formation of African states. These themes are: decolonisations dictated by the former metropole; the creation of *father of the nation* figures; and the management of cultural and ethnic diversity within the state realm.

In this paper, the aforementioned work of Mongo Beti will serve as a platform from which to explore these three themes in another Centre-West African context, namely Equatorial Guinea. Besides the 'Introduction' and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper forms part of the I+D project '*La gestión de la diversidad cultural y el impacto sociopolítico de las migraciones transnacionales en dos ex-colonias españolas: Guinea Ecuatorial y Marruecos*' [*The management of cultural diversity and the sociopolitical impact of transnational migrations in two former Spanish colonies: Equatorial Guinea and Morocco*] (HAR2011-22752), whose head researcher is Yolanda Aixelà (Institució Milà i Fontanals – Spanish National Research Council).

'Final Considerations' sections, the text will be divided into three parts: firstly, a colonial history of Equatorial Guinea and the legacy it left in regards to certain ethnic groups being discriminated against relative to others; secondly, a look at the founding of the state and the personalisation of politics through a 'father of the nation' figure; lastly, an overview of problems relating to issues of ethnic origin, that have been common to the country's two post-colonial dictatorships.

The *corpus* under analysis consists primarily of essay texts by Equatorial Guinea intellectuals who, like Mongo Beti, are writers of fiction as well as essays, and who are politically committed to fighting the country's dictatorship, whether as residents of Equatorial Guinea or as exiles. Donato Ndong Bidyogo, Justo Bolekia Boleká and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel are the three principle authors considered in this paper, though there will also be reference to and analysis of other Equatorial Guinean writers, such as the lawyer José Luís Nvumba and the economist Fernando Abaga Edjang. All these intellectuals benefited from a colonial education, or a post-colonial education within a Western model, and as such belong to an elite section of the population, and all strive to develop a better understanding of their country of origin. They provide historical testimony as experienced by social actors, and they defend frameworks for justice in their writings<sup>2</sup>, through a militant analysis of the form in which the state of Equatorial Guinea has, since its constitution in 1968, acceded to social and cultural inequalities.

The principle work of Donato Ndong Bidyogo considered here is *Historia y Tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial*, for it offers a complete history of the country since 1977 and aims to preserve history and collective memory of colonisation, such as it was at the time of the construction of the post-colonial state. Justo Bolekia Boleká and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel are the other highlighted authors, for both shine a light on the problem of the marginalisation of ethnic groups deemed minorities by the state, respectively the Bubi and the Ambô. They therefore write from the perspective of the country's marginalised. José Luís Nvumba and Fernando Abaga Edjang, both of Fang origin, reflect on the dictatorial state and the creation of inequalities within the Fang ethnic group, and thus offer a different angle on the supposed Fang privilege within the state.

By analysing arguments made in essays that are reflective of daily debate in the country, this paper aims to reach conclusions in regards to the role of colonial legacy and the role of post-colonial dictatorships in relation to the empowering of one ethnic group against another, and the political and social consequences of both factors. The paper will look at the way the state was institutionalised already divorced from a significant part of the population, a part that did not see itself represented in the state due to the particularising and personalising of power in the country's director, and through the state's perpetuating of inequalities.

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<sup>2</sup> For this definition of the intellectual, cf. Appiah 1997: 86 and Said 2000: 24, 32, 48–49.

One of the aims of this text is to consider whether ethnic problems in Equatorial Guinea are treated with *frivolity* (as claimed by Abaga Edjang 2005: 299). Ethnic discrimination is not discussed publicly, at state authority level, but is debated in ICT (information and communication technology) forums on a daily basis. Such forums cite the central role the dictatorship plays in empowering (albeit not always in real terms) members of president Teodoro Obiang Nguema's ethnicity (the Fang), concomitant to the taking away of rights from the country's other ethnic groups, the Ambôs, Bubis, Bisios, Ndowés and, on a lesser scale, Fernandinos. This matter is likewise the core concern of the Coalition of Opposition of the People and Citizens of Equatorial Guinea (CEIBA), a group made up of politicians and civil society social actors drawn from the country's different ethnic groups, some living in Equatorial Guinea, others abroad (exiled or not), and who call for plurinationality<sup>3</sup> to be respected. Founded in February 2012, the CEIBA aims to fight the dictatorship in order to construct a political system that respects individual and collective freedoms relating to ethnicity and political viewpoints, in which the sovereignty of the different *peoples* that comprise the state will be of paramount importance, and the model for which will be a federal democratic state.

Under the CEIBA alliance's proposal, the term *peoples* refers to the country's different ethnic groups and has come to be used as a synonym for *ethnicity*. In this paper, the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* can be considered as being synonymous with communities of the same language that, therefore, have a platform of belonging and sense of identity based on horizontal solidarities that are independent of the state.

## 2. PRESENT DISCRIMINATION AS A LEGACY FROM THE COLONIAL ERA

Donato Ndongo Bidyogo's *Historia y Tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* [*The History and Tragedy of Equatorial Guinea*], published in 1977, was the first history book on the country written by an Equatorial Guinean. In it we learn that the Spanish colonial state was characterised by social and racial discrimination and had as its objective the maximum exploitation of the work camps, or plantations. We also learn how independence came about and how the state was established along the same discriminatory lines that governed the colony. In 2003, the second history book on the country written by an Equatorial Guinean was published: *Aproximación a la Historia de Guinea Ecuatorial* [*A Rough History of Equatorial Guinea*], by Justo Bolekia Boleká. Both books look at the colonial history of territories that currently comprise the state and use them as a basis for discussing present discriminatory policies and practices as a hangover from the colonial era.

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<sup>3</sup> The statutes can be viewed here: <http://www.coalicion-ceiba.com/2012/11/estatutos-2/>.

The expression *land inherited from Portugal* is often used by Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003) as he defines Spain's early colonial occupation as being one of failed political initiatives, such as too little Spanish emigration to counter British influence on the island<sup>4</sup>. Spain's initial occupation came in the XIX century and began with the islands of Fernando Pó, Annobón, Corisco and Elobeys; the colonising of Rio Muni, which constituted the mainland section of the country, came later, in the XX century<sup>5</sup>. This colonial occupation took place in the face of an established presence of local populations: Ambô (on Annobón island); Bisio (on the coast of the mainland territory); Bubi (on Fernando Pó island); Fang (in the interior of the mainland territory); and Ndowé (on the coast of the mainland territory and on Corisco island).

In order for Spain to better exert its control over these territories, a number of institutions dependent on the Colonial Government were created, institutions that provided a framework for the civilising mission, the protection of the colonised people's interests and the development of the colonial economy through the establishment of a workforce to tend the plantations. The Colonial Trusteeship (1901) and the Counsel for Indigenous Peoples (1904) were critical in ensuring a pyramidal distinctions between whites and blacks, thus institutionalising Spanish racial colonial discrimination. From the 1940s on, the Counsel for Indigenous Peoples was responsible for the granting of letters of emancipation to black subjects, provided they showed *adhesion* to Spain and an ability to efficiently manage their own property. The autochthonous population was thus divided into the emancipated, be they partially or fully so, and the non-emancipated<sup>6</sup>.

Since the start of its colonisation of Fernando Pó island, Spain's primary concern was the maximum exploitation of the island's cocoa and coffee plantations. As the Bubi population proved too scarce and refractory for working the colonial plantations, the shortfall in the workforce was initially covered by bringing workers in from Anglophone Africa. These workers constituted a creole group known as Krió or Fernandino, who spoke *Pidgin English* and were

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<sup>4</sup> Following William Fitzwilliam Owen's expedition of October 1827, to the island of Fernando Pó, ceded by Portugal to Spain in the 1778 Treaty of Pardo, Great Britain built the city of Clarence (present day Malabo), to monitor the trafficking of slaves in the Gulf. In 1843, Spain assumed colonial control of the island and Juan José de Lerena y Bary changed the name of Clarence to Santa Isabel (Bolekia Boleká: 41–49).

<sup>5</sup> The Spanish colonisation of Rio Muni, the mainland section of the colony, is studied in depth by Gustau Nerín in *La Última Selva de España. Antropófagos y Guardias Civiles* [*The Last Jungle of Spain. Cannibals and Civil Guards*]. Mainland Spanish Guinea was one of the territories that, by the turn of the XX century, had suffered least from colonial pressures (Nerín 2010: 37).

<sup>6</sup> Information from Bolekia Boleká 2003: 74–87 and Ndongo Bidyogo 1977 37–38, 55. Regarding racial segregationism in Spanish colonialism, in an apartheid regime, cf. Aixelà Cabré 2011: 5–6. The emancipated were colonial subjects who could (in relative terms, given the racist nature of colonialism) acquire a status similar to that of Spaniards (Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 57).

granted privileges denied to the rest of the black population, such as the right to property (cf. Bolekia Boleká 2003: 65–66).

Ángel Barrera y Luyando's period of governance (in particular from 1910 to 1924<sup>7</sup>) was characterised by an increase in land concessions and a focus on cocoa, coffee and timber production, as well as for *pacifying* the Bubi and Fang communities and occupying their territories (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 77). Barrera y Luyando argued for Fernando Pó island to be repopulated by members of the Fang ethnic group, who would work the plantations and become the salvation of the island<sup>8</sup>. In a letter to the Ministry of State, which kept overall control of the colony, he outlined the labour shortfall problem and his administration's frustrated attempts at getting the Bubis to work the plantations. In order to turn this situation around, he proposed the transfer of 'whole tribes' from the mainland to Fernando Pó island, where they would settle on land conceded to them<sup>9</sup>. The 1930s saw a policy of gratification whereby land on the island was granted to non-autochthon indigenous people such as the Fang, land to live on and tend. When settling on Fernando Pó, they would have their rights protected and the land ceded to them would become their own property. Viewed from a colonial perspective, the Fang '[s]on libres y pueden arraigar en la Isla' ['are free and can settle on the island']<sup>10</sup>.

Thus one of the colony's labour provision policies on Fernando Pó island was the enforced transfer of groups of Fang, Nodwés and Ambô's to work in the labour camps. According to Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 77, 83 and 2005: 284, 287), members of the Fang ethnic group were empowered during the colonial period due to their being granted plots of land on Fernando Pó island, and thus occupying land that had previously been owned by the Bubi population, as well as by their being welcomed into the repressive Colonial Guard. From a Bubi perspective, their island had become occupied not only by the Spanish colonisers, but by Spanish-Guineans granted power under the represser's colonial system.

Discontent generated by the colony's discriminatory policies, by the expropriation of land (in which the white colonisers ended up with the most fertile and accessible territory) and by repression in general, led to the 1947

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<sup>7</sup> He had previously been governor in 1906–1907.

<sup>8</sup> General Archive of the Spanish Administration. Africa – Guinea. Signature: (15)4 box 81/6276. Dispatch 237 from 17 April 1911, signed by the Governor General Ángel Barrera y Luyando.

<sup>9</sup> General Archive of the Spanish Administration. Africa – Guinea. Signature: (15)4 box 81/6417. Document 497 of the Governor General of Spanish Territories in the Guinean Gulf, letter addressed to the Minister of State, 15 November 1910, signed by Ángel Barrera y Luyando.

<sup>10</sup> General Archive of the Spanish Administration. Africa – Guinea. Signature: (15)4 box 81/6415. Document 490 of the Director General of Morocco and the Colonies, Section of the Colonies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, relative to the 'Most complete study of the organisation of indigenous work in the Spanish Colonies in the Gulf of Guinea', 4 June 1931, signed by the Director General Antonio Cánovas.

creation of the Liberty Crusade<sup>11</sup>. The organisation's objective was to raise awareness among the population of colonial abuse and promote a path to independence. According to Donato Ndongo Bidyogo (1977: 72), Acácio Mañé was one of the movement's chief instigators. Mañé is considered an independence hero (Liniger-Goumaz 1986: 72) and portrayed by Donato Ndongo Bidyogo as 'a sort of mystical figure, loved and venerated by all' (1977: 73)<sup>12</sup>. Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 87–91), meanwhile, describes Acácio Mañé as a freedom fighter for the Fang people and treats Marcos Ropo Uri, a Bubi, as prime instigator of the anti-colonial movement.

Acácio Mañé was in contact with groups opposing the French colonial regime in Cameroon. In fact, relations between Equatorial Guinean nationalists and nationalists from Gabon and Cameroon in the 1950s led to accusations that a 'Fang empire' was being prepared, the Fang being a community of tremendous prominence in the region, and that this plan aimed to exclude all other communities. According to Donato Ndongo Bidyogo (1977: 74–75), these arguments were exploited by the Spanish colonial regime, through its local governor, whereby the colonial administration encouraged separatist feeling to develop in the different territories (Fernando Pó island and Rio Muni) and among the different communities that inhabited them. During this period, the Spanish colony no longer called itself the Spanish Territories of the Guinean Gulf, but rather the Spanish Overseas Provinces, a consequence of international pressures to decolonise following Spain's entry into the United Nations<sup>13</sup>.

Intent on continuing to exert control over the provinces, Spain launched a number of initiatives designed to encourage division, including the creation and diffusion of stereotypical portraits of ethnic groups. They told the Bubis and Ndowés that the Fang were savages and cannibals who had invaded both their territories and who wanted to expel ethnic groups from their land. Meanwhile, they spread the idea amongst the Fang that the Bubis were an inferior race, one that had become debased through alcoholism (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 93). Division between liberation leaders was also actively encouraged. Amidst the clamour for independence, differences between the two regions and between different ethnic groups led to the creation of political parties such as the Bubi Union, led by Edmundo Bosió Dioco, the Ndowé Union and the Democratic

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<sup>11</sup> The *Crusade* changed its name to the Movimiento Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial [National Movement for the Liberation of Equatorial Guinea] (MONALIGE) in 1952, by which time Atanasio Ndongo, Torao Sikara and Ebuka were activists (Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 74; Liniger-Goumaz 1986: 72–73).

<sup>12</sup> Among the measures taken by the colonial regime's to counter the independence movement's demands was the detention and eventual assassination of Acácio Mañé, which prompted protests amongst the general population and led to the departure of other noted nationalists: Bonifacio Ondó Edú left for Cameroon and Enrique Nvó, later assassinated in 1959, left for Gabon (Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 76–77; AC 2011: 25).

<sup>13</sup> The two overseas provinces being Fernando Pó and Rio Muni, the latter consisting of the mainland territory and the islands of Annobón, Corisco and Elobays (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 76, 89–90).

Fernandino Union (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 92, 97), parties with ethnic support bases.

Such were the circumstances when the country's autonomous regime came into being, on 1 January 1964, afforded four years to reach independence, if formally requested (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 98). The Autonomous Government was presided over by Bonifacio Ondó Edú, portrayed by Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 91) as an 'obedient catechist' who belonged to an elite that governed in accordance with the interests of the colonisers.

An autonomous regime was not enough for those who had advocated for full independence from what was, by then, a Spanish province. The nationalists met under the auspices of MONALIGE, of whom Francisco Macías Nguema was a prominent member, given his position of Vice-President of the Autonomous Government. MONALIGE wanted an independence distinct from those of the former French colonies, whose independence processes had been shaped by the former metropolises. So states Donato Ndong Bidyogo (1977: 107–108), an opinion that contrasts with that of Justo Bolekia Boleká. In the latter's book on the history of Equatorial Guinea, he argues that Spanish settlers set the agenda when the Law for the Basis of Autonomy was negotiated in Madrid. It was Spanish settlers who got to decide the make-up of the MONALIGE commission that traveled to Madrid and they saw in Francisco Macías Nguema someone they could trust to remain loyal to Spain<sup>14</sup>.

The 1967 Constitutional Conference on Equatorial Guinea, which featured participants from parties with ethnic support bases, such as the Bubi Union, drew up the path to independence for what was to become the country of Equatorial Guinea. The main topic of discussion was whether there should be joint or separate independence for the two provinces. In the end, the proposal put forward by the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs was approved, and a united state of Equatorial Guinea was declared, a decision that raised tensions between those advocating for two separate provinces and those championing one united state. In Spain, the independence of its former colony was designated *a classified matter* (Donato Ndong Bidyogo 1977: 114, 122; Bolekia Boleká 2003: 101–102), which meant a news blackout in Spain on all information relating to Equatorial Guinea. This law of silence continued in Spain long after Equatorial Guinea's independence, and Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 136) believes it was to protect the reputation of the former colony's first president, Francisco Macías Nguema.

The new state's Constitution was approved in a referendum on 11 August 1968, with votes against it registered in Fernando Pó, for it did not safeguard the existence of Bubis in the realm of the state (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 102). That's to say, the constitution made no allowance for ethnic groups who were *politically part of* the state (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 16). Events leading up to

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<sup>14</sup> According to Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 96), Macías would have told General Francisco Franco: "the people of Equatorial Guinea wish to remain loyal and forever united to Spain, under the Caudillo's protection".

independence are thus presented as having laid the foundations for inequalities suffered by the Bubis post-independence. As he sees it, in the ‘tierra de los bubis’ [‘land of the Bubis’], a colonial governor was substituted for a Fang governor (Bolekia Boleká 2005: 284), Francisco Macías Nguema, who was elected in 1968<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. REPRESENTATIONS OF A ‘COUNTRY OF NATIONS’

In his article ‘África en el sistema internacional de la posguerra fría o las respuestas africanas a los desafíos de la globalización’ [‘Africa in the post-Cold War international system and the African responses to the challenges of globalisation’], Mbuyi Kabunda puts forward the “teoría del *serkali* swahili o del *Bula Matari* kongo” [‘theory of the Swahili *serkali* or the Kongo *Bula Matari*’] in order to explain how post-colonial states preserve aggressive colonial structures. The state morphs into an extension of the colonial state, albeit an exogenous one, and the state itself becomes a hindrance to democracy and democracy’s development, by having democracy become associated with authoritarianism (Kabunda 2007: 36–38). This authoritarianism is personalised in the figure of the dictator. Donato Ndongo Bidyogo (2002: 128) considers the figure of the African dictator to be uniform across the continent. The African dictator is a descendant of the colonial governor, in a clear transposing of colonialism on to the independent state, through violence and individual ambition.

In Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo was chosen for president by the *Élysée*. He was a man who championed himself as the only person capable of forging a collective history. In Mongo Beti’s *Main Basse sur le Cameroun*, Ahidjo is portrayed as the puppet figure for a regime that was forever collaborating with the former colonial power.

Ahidjo was afforded numerous titles: *Father of the Nation*, *Prophet of Pan-Africanism*, and *Defender of African Dignity*, among others (Beti 2010: 61). But he is also accused of Cameroonian fratricide, through imprisonment, disappearances and exile (Beti 2010: 59). Beti presents Ahidjo as a functionary of the colonial administration, ‘illettré’ (Beti 2010: 48), ‘musulman africain’ (Beti 2010: 49) or ‘le petit Peul’, whose presidency was legitimised by France, thus securing Peul hegemony of the Cameroonian political landscape. Paris’ choice of Ahmadou Ahidjo was, according to Mongo Beti, partly motivated by the colonial perception that the north of the country was *culturally homogenous* and that the south was a *Liliput* of ethnic groups (Beti 2010: 59–60, 146). The selection of Ahidjo would therefore help institutionalise a centralised state

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<sup>15</sup> Defining Francisco Macías Nguema, along with the Cameroonian Ahmadou Ahidjo, as a colonial functionary was the interpretation reached by the Mongomo tribunal and propagated by the relevant municipal authority (Liniger-Goumaz 1986: 75). Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 105) merely treats him as a colony’s star pupil.



committed to promoting unity in policy and practice. This colonial perception of cultural homogeneity in the north was based solely on religion and ignored other social factors such as ethnicity, and is a clear example of the negative view colonisers held for heterogeneity<sup>16</sup>.

If heroification of those in power, by their being held up as ‘father of the nation’ figures, leads to ‘history being distorted’ or ‘memory being confiscated’ (M'Bokolo 2007: 499), both Mongo Beti and Donato Ndongo Bidyogo offer the reverse analysis when considering the first presidents of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.

The argument for unity was the central theme of the Equatorial Guinea presidential election campaign. Although Spain's preferred candidate was Bonifácio Ondó Edú, the 1968 elections were won by Macías Nguema, due to a combination of populism, skilled public speaking and appeals for peace and unity, the cornerstones for creating a national consciousness (Donato Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 129–131, 138–143).

In Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Macías Nguema proved himself a mere heir to the colonial governor.

Colonial dictatorships put African dictatorships in power, meaning that ‘the political system went on being one of colonial dictatorship’ (Okenve Ndo 2009: 3). And Francisco Macías Nguema's dictatorship came to be defined by his stranglehold on the economy, and by the impunity with which his agents acted, censoring, violating, torturing, stealing and murdering swathes of Equatorial Guineans who either had ties to the colonisers, opposed the regime or had intellectual leanings. So many people went into exile as a consequence of his dictatorship that Justo Bolekia Boleká speaks of a ‘lost generation’. The regime's psychosis of suspicion brought escalating violence, the dictatorship being prepared to stop at nothing to protect itself. The ‘Juventudes en Marcha con Macías’ [‘Youth on the March with Macías’] and the militias were the regime's weapons of terror, the Partido Único Nacional [Sole National Party], later changed to the Partido Único Nacional de Trabajadores [Sole National Workers Party] (PUNT), its power base inside the state<sup>17</sup>.

The personification and sanctification of the President of the Republic, allied to a reign of terror, religious and political persecution and paralysis in all public spheres, from education to agriculture and health, meant that the regime can only be defined as one of *disorder* and *personalism*, according to Donato Ndongo Bidyogo (1977: 220–227). His book highlights the personalism of the regime, referring to Macías as the *father of the nation* and the *founder of the*

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<sup>16</sup> Aníbal Quijano (2007: 120–125) cites various associations as being the colonisers of power, such as the relationship between politics and culture, or universality of capitalism. In this Eurocentric logic, gender and culture relations rank highest. Social and cultural heterogeneity is therefore taken as an impediment to unity, prompting restrictions on localised patrimony.

<sup>17</sup> Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 152–160, 175–180, 187, 205–207; Bolekia Boleká 2003: 136. See also Aixelà Cabré 2011: 16–19.

state (Donato Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 251). Justo Bolekia Boleká also sees the state personalised in the figure of Francisco Macías Nguema, in *Aproximación a la Historia de Guinea Ecuatorial* [A Rough History of Equatorial Guinea], under a chapter entitled 'Equatorial Guinea'. As well as the *founder* of the nation, Macías Nguema had himself also hailed as the 'One God and miraculous saviour of the Guinean people', 'Great Macías', 'Great Master of Equatorial Guinean Education, Science and Culture', 'Father of Liberty', 'Father of the Revolution', 'Supreme Leader of the African Democratic Revolution', 'One Leader and National Hero' and the 'Leader of Steel,' (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 135–136; Donato Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 230–235, 271). He portrayed himself as the lifelong, indispensable leader of a party at the service of the people.

Thus, inhabitants of the former Spanish colony were *subjects*, not citizens (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 105, 156), subjects who were trapped in a wave of escalating violence and totally isolated in relation to the outside world. Widespread use of the term *matanzas* ['massacres'] gave extra emphasis to the reign of terror, especially in light of the 1972 public execution of numerous former colonial functionaries, as well as opponents and critics of the regime, along with their respective families, or via the obliteration of entire settlements, which prompted people to flee to frontier zones (Donato Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 220).

Alongside a policy of terror, Macías Nguema developed a *policy of authenticity*, examples of which include prohibiting Christian religious practices and outlawing the use of non-African names (Donato Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 227). Macías Nguema also chose to change the name of Fernando Pó island to Macías Nguema Biyogo island; Santa Isabel became Malabo; San Fernando became Ciudad Ela Nguema; and Annobón island became Isla Pa Galu (Donato Ndongo Bidyogo 1977: 230–235). Some names would later be changed again by Teodoro Obiang Nguema, principally the islands of Macías Nguema and Pa Galu, which took their present names: Bioko and Annobón.

These toponymic changes are the subject of a text by Humberto Riochi, a spokesman for the Movement for Bioko Island Self-Rule (MAIB), entitled 'Asimilación y exterminio cultural' ['Assimilation and cultural extinction'] (2008). For the Bubi population, the ruling Fang's occupation of Bioko island meant the imposition of new names that were exogenous in nature, as names of Fang places and people were introduced with total disregard for the patrimony of the island and existing names that honoured Bubi individuals considered to be national heroes. It also meant that ceremonial acts relating to Bubi identity, such as worship of the deity Bisila, began to be controlled.

Under Francisco Macías Nguema and his controlling policies, *Nguemism* began to exert its grip over Equatorial Guinea. *Nguemism* can be described as a *pseudophilosophy* or a *pseudoideology* that treats the state as the private affair of Macías and his horizontal family, the only people with real power and control of the state. *Nguemism* is rule defined by nepotism, clanism, torture and the

violation of human rights and freedoms (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 124, 141 and 2005: 284).

Macías Nguema was overthrown in the *Freedom Coup* of 3 August 1979 and subsequently executed. The coup was led by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who was at the time, among other things, chief of the Armed Forces and director of the notorious Black Beach prison, still considered one of the worst prisons in the world even today (cf. Bolekia Boleká 2003: 124, 134–139). His regime is a continuation of *Nguemism* and is dubbed the ‘second Nguemist dictatorship’. While Francisco Macías Nguema was a colonial functionary who succeeded the regime he had been an auxiliary of, Obiang succeeded his own uncle, someone for whom he had implemented policies and practices of repression.

In the words of Okenve Ndo (2009: 9), a “dictatorial clan” regime established itself in Equatorial Guinea, by which he refers to the Esangui clan, the clan to which both of the country’s post-independence presidents belonged<sup>18</sup>. Donato Ndongo Bidyogo treats the Macías dictatorship as an autocratic and personalist regime, though not one associated with a clan, as Okenve Ondo suggests. Nor does Ndongo Bidyogo associate *Nguemism* with the Fang community, as Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel does (2009: 331). Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel describes the regime as an *ethnocracy*, one that provokes divisions in the country by affording privileges to the Fang and by the Fang predominating in the public sphere, most notably in politics and the military.

Reflecting on the meaning of power in Equatorial Guinea, and the idea that the state has become the patrimony of the Esangui family, Justo Bolekia Boleká highlights the power to appropriate property and violate people and land rights, a power afforded to members of an ethnic group that believes itself the custodian of power. However, while power is, in his words, *ethnicised*, the state itself is *clanicised*, which prevents all members of the Fang community from reaping the rewards of state property (Bolekia Boleká 2005: 266–268, 279). Boleká returns to the figure of the Fang chief (*nkúkúamá*) to explain the authoritarian way Francisco Macías Nguema appropriated the state and exerted his influence over members of his own ethnic group, who had to obey him in order to strengthen the group’s cohesion. Writing from a Bubi perspective, Boleká cites several examples of the Fang exercising its power, including Fang men raping Bubi women, the expropriation of Bubi land on Bioko island and the establishment of military checkpoints (operated by Fang soldiers) in the island’s villages (Bolekia Boleká 2005: 269).

In institutional terms, while the PUNT and the Juventudes en Marcha con Macías were satellites of the first dictatorship, Obiang Nguema, in turn, created the Partido Democrático da Guiné Equatorial [Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea] (PDGE), in 1987, and the Amigos de Obiang [Friends of Obiang]

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<sup>18</sup> Max Liniger-Goumaz (1986: 164) even treats the Obiang regime as “la dictature Esangui numéro 2” [‘the second Esangui dictatorship’]. Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 156 and 2005: 293) sees Equatorial Guinea as a “Patrimony-State of Esangui”.

(Bolekia Boleká 2003: 147). The PDGE was, until 1991, the only legal party, the party to which the population had to adhere.

In 2011, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel published the *Diccionario Básico, y Aleatorio, de la Dictadura Guineana* [*The Basic, and Random, Dictionary of the Equatorial Guinea Dictatorship*], in order to explain the ‘temas pilares del régimen de Obiang’ [‘pillars of the Obiang regime’] and seek solutions to bring about ‘su erradicación’ [‘its eradication’] (Ávila Laurel 2011: 8). The first entry cites two key dates that are celebrated by the regime, Independence Day, on 12 October, and Freedom Coup Day, on 3 August. Independence brought the country isolation, due to Spain’s decreed blockade on all information relating to its former colony, and no debating of the aims of independence. In its turn, *Freedom Coup Day*, as Obiang’s coup against Macías became known, meant the destruction of Macías by ‘el hoy general Obiang’ [‘the now General Obiang’], but the author blames both dictators for crimes they perpetuated together (Ávila Laurel 2011: 9). In regards to 12 October, José Luís Nvumba, lawyer and former militant of the *Convergência Para a Democracia Social* [Convergence for Social Democracy] (CPDS), who now lives in exile in Barcelona, points out that independence did not bring emancipation for the different peoples who comprise Equatorial Guinea; rather it provided a launchpad for installing the Macías dictatorship and the current *Obiangngemism* (Nvumba 2012c).

According to Fernando Abaga Edjang, power is controlled by the Esangui clan, with its roots in Mongomo. At the centre of the system is the President of the Republic, who belongs, by turn and in sequence, to the Esangui clan of Akoakam, the district of Mongomo, the province of Wele Nzas and the Fang ethnic group. The line of succession from the President of the Republic goes, in order of importance: family; village; district; province; ethnicity. Despite initially underlining the importance of the clan, Abaga Edjang later places its importance as secondary relative to Obiang Nguema’s direct family and, even, the district they hail from. According to Edjang’s analysis, in terms of access to power, an Esangui from Ebibiyin would be second in line relative to any clan member from the Mongomo district, such as Essawong. In the same text, the author later contradicts himself by stating that the president of the republic is above the law and enjoys unlimited rights, followed, in turn, by his family, clan, district, province and ethnicity, in regards to arbitrariness and impunity (Abang Ejang, 2005: 303–304). As for formal politics, decision-making circles depart, always, from the president of the republic at the centre, and out to the Esangui clan, the district of Mongomo, the province of Wele-Nzas, and only then to the PDGE, the Party-State (cf. Okenve 2009: 1–4).

Teodoro Obiang Nguema, ‘de no haber sido ya reclamado por Macías, (...) se hubiera proclamado vitalicio’ [‘would have proclaimed himself leader for life (...) if Macías had not already declared the same thing’] (Ávila Laurel 2011: 19), for as the father of the nation, he claims to have rescued the country from the *unforgettable dark days of the dictatorship* and now be presiding over a new era. But more than just perpetuating the continuation of a monopoly on political and

economic power, he has brought about social and political gridlock, a situation that is turning the country's inhabitants into 'los desheredados del África más empobrecida' ['the dispossessed of the most impoverished part of Africa'] (Ávila Laurel 2011: 34), despite the country being the third largest producer of oil in Sub-Saharan Africa and having a high per capita income.

#### 4. THE INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ETHNIC BELONGING

In treating the state as a *Nguemist* family affair, a direct substitution of the colonial state, Justo Bolekia Boleká (2003: 142) sees ethnic discrimination as well as political discrimination. He uses the term 'annihilation' (2005: 285) to define the dictatorship's objectives relative to the Bubi population. And if the Spanish colonial enterprise was marked by racial and separatist segregation<sup>19</sup>, aimed at "*la destrucción del imaginario colectivo e intra/interétnico guineoecuadoriano* ['destroying collective and intra/interethnic Equatorial Guinean memory']" (Bolekia Boleká 2009: 5), that process of destruction has found a "*plenitud de vigencia* ['full validation']" (in the words of José Luís Nvumba 2012a) in both post-independence dictatorships, due to the total lack of reference to ethnic communities in relation to the country's history.

In the pamphlet *Francisco Macías Nguema, Candidato del Pueblo para la Presidencia de la República* ['Francisco Macías Nguema, the People's Candidate for President of the Republic'], issued ahead of the 1968 elections, unity was the aim, a unity which implied respect for the idiosyncrasies of the island (here used to refer to Fernando Pó island, and not the other islands) and Rio Muni. The concept of unity is particularly prominent, with reference to "*unidad como nación* ['unity as a nation']," "*unidad de consciencia nacional* ['unity of national conscience']," so it can be a "*nación moderna* ['modern nation']" (Donato Ndongó Bidyogo 1977: 142). The Macías constitution established in 1973 was supposed to legislate for integrating initiatives, using supposed shared histories and traditions to bring about an Equatorial Guinea that was *una e indivisible* [*one and indivisible*], with all social and political life revolving around the Party and the organs of state (Donato Ndongó Bidyogo 1977: 235–236).

Imposing and idealising a binary conceptual pair of *heterogeneity* and *homogeneity* at the heart of an artificially manufactured nation, does not allow for differences. In a transferral of the concepts that constituted colonial nations, from a Eurocentric diffusionist perspective, the nation, as constructed by the state, should theoretically serve as a platform for the preservation of the group<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> For more on Spanish colonial racial segregationism, cf. Aixelà Cabré 2011: 5–6.

<sup>20</sup> As can be read in Gellner 1993: 85. In order to serve as a platform for the preservation of the group, the nation promotes concepts of identification and loyalty, with coercion not unusual.

The state should therefore be a platform for strengthening an idealised sense of community, but it struggles to do so when it is up against a wealth of different cultures that need incorporating<sup>21</sup>.

The 'myth of Bantu unity' (Cusak 1999) would be one of the devices used to construct a national conscience in Equatorial Guinea<sup>22</sup>. The elite in power invoked this myth of claimed common origin and *bantuity* is now written into the Constitution, having been approved in 2012. Article 106°, relating to the Cabinet of the Republic, includes a passage that refers to the 'defensa de los valores de las culturas autóctonas, la identidad bantú y africana, así como la civilización universal' ['defence of the values of the autochthon cultures, of Bantu and African identity, and universal civilisation'], the only paragraph in the fundamental laws of the state that makes any reference to the construction of a national identity. Indeed the passage is mere rhetoric, lip service to those who call for an end of so-called minority ethnic groups being discriminated against, for despite much talk of unity, the Macías and Obiang dictatorships both enacted policies of fragmentation, as used in the colonial *divide et impera*.

Using the word 'minority' when describing ethnic groups, as cited in the previous paragraph, is encouraged by the authorities because, according to Mongo Beti (2010: 208), to speak of ethnic groups as being a majority or minority is a way to 'toxify opinion'. Justo Bolekia Boleká (2005) likewise argues that use of the word serves the interests of a political system dominated by the largest ethnic group in numerical terms. Bubis, Ndowés and Ambôs found that there was no place for them in Equatorial Guinea's personalised dictatorship that they were to be marginalised and have their land occupied. The integration of so many Fang into the regime's militias, and the Fang's occupation of land that belonged to other groups, are two factors that particularly stand out (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 121–123).

The denial of ethnic differences and the preponderance of the Fang – or the country's *fanganización* ['Fangisation'] to use the term employed by Yolanda Aixelà Cabré (2011: 140) – in the territories they occupy, encourages a relationships of subjugation and the imposition of an exogenous culture on to the autochthones. According to Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel (2003), equality between different ethnic groups, as proclaimed in the national anthem, is simply not adhered to by the country's rulers, and Equatorial Guinea is defined as a country by its being abandoned by the state in the very areas that ought to be state priorities: poverty-reduction; provision of adequate shelter; health care; education; access to water. Thus, the colonial and post-colonial periods in Equatorial Guinea are characterised by the exploitation of the patrimony of society (cf. Aixelà Cabré 2011: 5).

In his blog, *Malabo*, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel portrays Equatorial Guinea as Obiang Nguema's *republicanised realm* or *non-republic*. Ávila Laurel exposes

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<sup>21</sup> For a recent dissection of this problem, cf. Iniesta 2007: 16–17, 30.

<sup>22</sup> The other factors he considers are Spanish legacy, the unity of diversity achieved by the authoritarian regime of Francisco Macías and the treatment of exiles.

the way power has been confiscated by the Fang to the detriment of other ethnicities, who developed resistance strategies against the “pamues, que (...) se precian de que se les llamen fang [‘pamues<sup>23</sup> who... (...) take great delight in being called Fang’<sup>24</sup>],” and he asks “¿Para qué querían ver el mar los pamues, hoy fang? [‘Why do the pamues, now Fang, want to see the sea so much?’<sup>25</sup>].” The rhetorical question refers to the Fang seizing power and appropriating the argument for unity, unity as proclaimed by the clan in power, when power in the first place was seized by their appropriating land off other groups.

The lack of a designated area that each ethnic group might determine, or in which it might express itself, its future as part of the whole, is a consequence of a clan state hijacking Equatorial Guinean identity (Bolekia Boleká 2009: 8). Andrés Esono (2012), political scientist and a member of the only opposition political party with a parliamentary seat, the *Convergencia Para la Democracia Social* [Convergence for Social Democracy] (CPDS), considers the non-existence of a people [an Equatorial Guinean people as opposed to disparate ethnic peoples] to be the consequence of it being impossible to exercise one’s rights as a citizen, a hangover from the colonial dictatorship that is still in evidence today.

Those who do not belong to the inner-circles of formal power, seek to protect their interests through family, religious and ethnic connections<sup>26</sup>. The state is exogenous and ethnicity forms the basis of identification (and of identity) in a context of disunion. If the phrase “The goat eats where it is tethered” serves, on a micro level, to show how citizens view the personalised workings of the state to be an exercise in the ‘politics of the belly’, a term coined by Bayart (1999), prevalent use of the expression *aguantando* [‘surviving’] or *aguantando la miseria* [‘surviving poverty’], whenever Equatorial Guineans are asked about their circumstances and sense of social fulfilment, speaks of the country’s terrible disjointedness. It was this disjointedness that prompted Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel to write the *Diccionario Básico, y Aleatorio, de la Dictadura Guineana* [*The Basic, and Random, Dictionary of the Equatorial Guinean Dictatorship*] (2011). Throughout the book, the author – a man writing very much from outside the formal framework of state politics – presents clearly a new political project for the country, one for an egalitarian state free of the clutches of a dictatorship that “*nos come el alma* [‘eats at our soul’].” He is a dissonant intellectual, if we follow Edward Said’s typology in *Representations of the Intellectual* (2000: 54–55), one who is

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<sup>23</sup> Pamue was the Spanish colonial name for the Fang.

<sup>24</sup> Entitled “planes para el sábado en Guinea Ecuatorial [‘plans for an Equatorial Guinean sabbatical’]” <http://www.fronterad.com/?q=node/375> (accessed in December 2010).

<sup>25</sup> As can be confirmed in entries of 2 February, 5 April and 9 November 2010, (<http://www.fronterad.com/?q=node/677>, <http://www.fronterad.com/?q=node/1102>, <http://www.fronterad.com/?q=node/2321>), accessed in December 2010.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this matter, see Kabunda 2007: 38–41 and Beti 2010: 84.

unaccommodated and at odds with society, and for whom the privileges of power are out of reach.

For Justo Bolekia Boleká too, the Equatorial Guinean state, such as it is institutionalised, means the *involution* of non-Fang ethnic groups and the dispossession of their traditional powers. Thus, he proposes a state model that protects the cultural and historical diversity of all ethnic groups. For this to occur, the interethnic meeting of peoples would have to be promoted, and reconciliation brought about through the decentralisation of a state that is too concentrated in the figure of its director, and does not recognise different cultural identities, nor their right to their own areas, and instead imposes Fang upon them as the vehicular language (Bolekia Boleká 2003: 152–156 and 2005: 271, 293). The *Fangisation* of the state promotes inequality by imposing use of the Fang language in Equatorial Guinea and its diplomatic missions. Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel (2011: 48) cites the example of Fang being used as the vehicular language of the Equatorial Guinean Embassy in Madrid, thus transposing the language's dominance on to an institution that is supposed to serve all citizens equally, regardless of ethnic origin. The non-existent unity of the state is dealt with in other entries of his *Diccionario Básico, y Aleatorio, de la Dictadura Guineana (The Basic, and Random Dictionary of the Equatorial Guinean Dictatorship)*, including 'ethnic political parties' and 'national cohesion'.

In regards to 'ethnic political parties', which include the Movement for Bioko Island Self-Rule, legacy party of Bubi Union, and the People's Party of Ndowé Etomba, in Ndowé, Ávila Laurel addresses the controversy caused by their protesting against marginalisation by the state of the Bubi and Ndowé populations, for the Fang view both parties as secessionists. The *Diccionario* goes beyond the exercise of formal politics to consider issues such as the way student grants for overseas study are awarded based on ethnic exclusion (Ávila Laurel 2011: 25).

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel recognises that ethnic parties provide forums where people can share a sense of belonging, on the one hand, and shelter from the dictatorship, on the other. However, it is the dictatorship that justifies the existence of these parties, and it is the dictatorship that trains an army to repress the population rather than defend it. Ethnic belonging is also used to justify some groups trampling over others, with the military again the main culprit, and to justify widespread victimisation, in a country where concepts of identification and identitisation are actively enforced upon society on a daily basis (Ávila Laurel 2011: 25–26, 33).

But José Luís Nvumba, as a Fang, from the ngüëñ clan, makes his point loud and clear, in capital letters, when he states that “*NINGUNA DE LAS DOS DICTADURAS INSTALADAS TRAS LA INDEPENDENCIA DE G.E REPRESENTA AL PUEBLO FANG* [‘Neither of the two dictatorships installed since Equatorial Guinea’s independence has represented the Fang people’]” (Nvumba 2011c).



Nvumba's collection of texts entitled "¿Estamos encaminados hacia la democracia? ['Are we on the road to democracy?']<sup>27</sup>," published in 2011 and 2012, suggests certain advances that will have to come about in civil society, if democracy is to emerge from beyond *Obiangnguemist* structures. These advances include the young taking action and intellectuals standing firm in their arguments, thus allowing people to believe in the fight, to believe in the possibility of ending the dictatorship, of ending a 'misgoverning', arbitrary and inhumane regime that hijacks people's rights and freedoms, including freedoms the author defines as 'nacionalismos sociológicos' ['sociological nationalisms']. That discussions relating to ethnicity exist is encouraging in terms of freedom of expression and democracy, and the fact that these groups have assumed some prominence under the Obiang dictatorship is likewise a positive sign, in terms of these ethnicities reclaiming their identities (Nvumba 2011a, 2011b).

José Luís Nvumba's writings are consistent with an 'ethnic reading of the dictatorship', whereby the protection of the Fang community's position is instrumentalised by the placing of members of the Fang culture into posts in which they can exert control over the rest of the population, and thus feel themselves protected (cf. Ávila Laurel 2011: 13, 60). As far as Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel is concerned, secession is a reality in the country. The different populations live apart and the Fang dominate institutions such as the army and offices of political power (Ávila Laurel 2011: 61). Nor does social cohesion exist, for the dictatorship's fear of secession is reciprocated in the dictator's fear of his no longer being Chief of a state in which he's a sort of *king* or *tribal chief* (Ávila Laurel 2011: 55). It is clear that in this 'ethical reading':

Llegados a la actual situación de la dictadura, debe ser el régimen el que tenga que hacer esfuerzos para convencer a las comunidades étnicas de las ventajas de formar parte de una entidad política llamada Guinea Ecuatorial, y no que estas comunidades se tengan que disculpar por su queja pública de los horrores sufridos a manos de un régimen cruel. El mero descubrimiento de la paradoja encerrada en este punto es una muestra más de la irracionalidad de la dictadura de Teodoro Obiang.

[At this stage of the dictatorship, it's the regime that should be having to convince ethnic communities of the advantages of forming part of a political entity called Equatorial Guinea, not these communities having to apologise for publicly protesting about the horrors they suffer at the hands of such a cruel regime. Mere recognition of the paradox that

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<sup>27</sup> These texts can be found published on the webpage [www.guinea-ecuatorial.net](http://www.guinea-ecuatorial.net). It's worth mentioning that the Internet is an important platform for the diffusion of texts from an assortment of social and political actors, be they living in exile or opposing the regime from within the country. The following pages are examples of this: LOCOSTV ([www.laslocurasdejamonyqueso.blogspot.com](http://www.laslocurasdejamonyqueso.blogspot.com)), run by the most well-known cartoonist in the country, Ramón Nsé Esono Ebalé, and Radio Macuto ([www.radiomacuto.info](http://www.radiomacuto.info)), run by the dissident Josimar Oyono Eseng, two platforms that exercise freedom of expression and information in regards to Equatorial Guinea.

encompasses this particular point, demonstrates the irrationality of Teodoro Obiang's regime.] (Ávila Laurel 2011: 61).]

This irrationality is also reflected in the texts "G.E.: Un Estado Plurinacional ['E.G.: A Plurinational State']" by José Luís Nvumba. Recognising the plurinationality of a nation where plurinationality has been smothered, ever since independence, by a 'país centralista y unitario donde todos los poderes se hallan concentrados en manos del dictador, su familia y adláteres, que además son incapaces de diferenciar los espacios públicos de los privados' ['centralist and unitary country where all powers are concentrated in the hands of the dictator, his family and associates, who are, furthermore, incapable of differentiating between public and private spheres'] (Nvumba 2012b), strengthens non-identification with the state and reinforces identification with ethnic and clan groups, for it is only possible to form national unity by seeking consensus between the different peoples, and via an education system that teaches citizens about all the country's cultures. The citizen figure never emerged in Equatorial Guinea, power never alternated between different ethnicities and a sense of common identity never formed (Nvumba 2012c).

Due to these discriminatory characteristics, and because he considers that the *Estado-patrimonio nguemista* [Nguemist state-patrimony] turns citizens into subjects who are deprived of their own languages and identities, Justo Bolekia Boleká (2005) proposes the establishment of a Federal Republic of Equatorial Guinea. He politicises the ethnic question by encapsulating the aspirations of each and every group into one joint state. Thus he appeals to Ndowés and Bisiós, who aspire to self-rule, as do the Bubis, who also want to manage their own natural resources<sup>28</sup> and define their integration, or non-integration, within the state (Bolekia Boleká 2005: 290–291).

Justo Bolekia Boleká deals with the Bubi community's inclusion within the state in a very particular way, in a narrative of aggressors and the aggressed. The Bubis are the aggressed, for they must pass through military checkpoints in order to move about *their* island, they are the victims of arbitrary imprisonments and numerous violations, and they have had land they cultivated and lived on expropriated. Some members of the Fang ethnicity are also aggressed, though they are made out to be aggressors, and suffer attacks, violations and executions. The first time the Fang as an ethnic group are cited in this aggression context is through mention of the dictatorship's debilitating of rural populations, though no particular ethnic group is cited. According to Boleká, the Bubi population is the most aggressed of the ethnic groups by the "*usurpadores de turno* ['the latest usurpers']", as the group attempts to protect its language, culture and territoriality (Bolekia Boleká 2005: 272–274).

An episode of terror under the Obiang Nguema regime that typifies Fang aggression towards Bubis came following an armed uprising by young Bubis,

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<sup>28</sup> Oil, the major form of state income, is 'exploited on Bubi soil' (Bolekia Boleká 2005: 272–273).

who on 21 January 1998 called for the autonomy of Bioko island<sup>29</sup>. As far as Fernando Abaga Edjang (2005: 297) is concerned, that was the moment when “*estalló la ‘bomba étnica’ en Guinea Ecuatorial* [‘the “ethnic bomb” went off in Equatorial Guinea’].” Teodoro Obiang’s regime responded with violence, seizing, torturing and killing people in their droves. Justo Bolekia Boleká (2005: 273) thinks the dictatorship made the most of the situation in order to threaten the Bubi ethnic group. Fernando Abaga Edjang (2005: 298) refers to claims that the objective of the revolt was to expel the Fang from Bioko island, saying that such a claim could only have been gathered through coercion and that the regime’s response was unjust and sought to deny the existence of legitimate ethnic concerns.

Abaga Edjang points to the establishment of a united state following independence as the most significant cause of Equatorial Guinea’s ethnic problems, due to a politics of homogenisation based on Fang culture (Abaga Ejang, 2005: 301–302). He likewise cites the huge presence of Fang people on Bioko island, which Bubis view as an ‘invasion’, and which has been echoed through policies that in no way respect Bubi idiosyncrasies (Abaga Ejang, 2005: 308–309).

Abaga Edjang does not agree with Justo Bolekia Boleká’s reading of Bubi/Fang relations and the notion that the regime’s aim is to exterminate the Bubi ethnic group. Instead he proposes certain solutions for what he calls Equatorial Guinea’s ethnic conflict. Besides the need to politically reform the state and encourage education in order to achieve a shared civic sense of culture, common patrimonies must also be protected, and a belief that the state is for all must be nurtured. The model of a Federal State serves these purposes, as does emphasising common matters of background that encourage a sense of integration among Equatorial Guineans, such as “*cultura bantu* [‘Bantu culture’],” the catholic faith and the Spanish language (Abaga Ejang, 2005: 315–322).

These possible unifying factors are made impossible by the hijacking of the state and the population by the dictatorial regime. One unifying factor common to most inhabitants of the country since the dictatorship of Francisco Macías Nguema<sup>30</sup> is terror. All ethnic groups have a shared memory of tyranny and fear. The way the dictatorship has implanted itself into the daily lives of different

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<sup>29</sup> The 2008 report of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees cites this episode (<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,MRGI,,GNQ,,49749d2ac,0.html>, accessed in November 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Obiang Nguema uses the violence of the Macías years (it is estimated that over 10,000 people were killed) to justifying his own regime's acts of terror, thus appealing to collective memory while suppressing opposition activity (Aixelà Cabré 2011: 6, 55). Examples from the 1980s include arbitrary detentions, disappearances, the prohibiting of the right to association and the violation of health rights, alongside encouragement of the consumption of alcoholic beverages and drugs (Liniger-Goumaz 1986: 197). Similar violations of fundamental rights are known to be prevalent today. To give one example, the assassination of Padre Jorge Bitá Kaeko in 2011 has still yet to be explained.

populations, and the belief that dictatorship is a sort of African *modus vivendi*, in a clear “*hecho racial diferencial* [‘differential racial fact’]” (Ávila Laurel 2011: 28–29), is used to justify their living in poverty, with a lack of health care, water and electricity. This situation contrasts with the dictatorship’s claimed commitment to ‘progress’, through the facade of projects such as the building of roads in Oyala, a city in the regional interior of the mainland, or a campaign to substitute roofs of *nipa* palm on shanty-town housing for zinc ones, as promoted in 2012 by Teodoro Nguema Obiang, or Teodorín, the president’s eldest son and assumed successor in the dynastic system.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The hijacking of the state and population by Equatorial Guinea’s two post-colonial dictatorships is the constant theme that runs throughout all texts studied for this paper. It is the hallmark of a dictatorial state, one that is clientelistic and run as the private family affair of the chief, for social rights to be withheld and those in power to prove themselves incapable of respecting diverse political opinions or protecting diversity.

The dynamics of interethnic relations, and the arguments put forward relating to diversity, speak of the political and epistemic significance of identities that are considered in this paper, but that are invisible officially. The types of identity created under the colonial system, by decree and through daily and academic discourse, identities based on the concept of race, have ended up being echoed in the dictatorship’s attitude and approach towards ethnic communities. It is the opinion of the authors studied here that both Esangui governments have undermined the chances of all ethnic groups coming to identify themselves under the banner of ‘Equatorial Guinea’. To be a plural country, a country has to act as one. Although emerging out of a climate of *anti-intellectualism*<sup>31</sup>, the questions raised by these authors defy orthodoxy, for they offer proposals that differ from present institutionalised policy, policy that these authors dissect and criticise, refusing to allow themselves be co-opted by organisations that defend interests that are radically different to the ones they represent. These subjects speak out from a local perspective, against state terrorism and its familiarisation.

The Esangui clan, to which Teodoro Obiang Nguema belongs, proclaims a belief in national unity. The state has become the property of this clan group, as has the rhetoric of unity, echoed through a repressive system (and this system is not just local, but rather extends throughout the global colonial system, with numerous centres and interests that keep the dictatorial machine going) that is

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<sup>31</sup> This anti-intellectualism was one of the cornerstones of Macías’ cultural politics, under whom it was even forbidden to use the word ‘intellectual’ (Sundiata 1990: 133; Liniger-Goumaz 1986: 83). It continues under Obiang, where one only has to consider the regime’s disinvestment in education.

joined at the hip to political power, and that is brought to bear upon the daily lives of the population by the military, who are stationed at barriers that control the entrances and exits of the main cities and all movement to and from the settlements, and which not infrequently results in bribes having to be paid.

The issues presented here amount to the privatisation of sovereignty and to post-colonial state impunity, which in turn lead to subjugation becoming infused into social and political ideals, as explained by Achille Mbembe throughout his book, *On The Postcolony* (2001). *Sovereignty, life and death*, intermingled, are typical characteristics of the post-colonial state and the post-colonial machine, since its institutions affirm an incontestable power over what Mbembe calls the “postcolonized subject”. In this sense, the post-colonial machine seeks to regulate the social, cultural and political, determining who shall live or die within the state, while ignoring in its discourse any solidarity networks that individuals develop outside the web of power and the organs of state (cf. Mbembe, 2001: 54, 129). It is in this way that the post-colony continues to distinguish between *what* or *who* is a *human being*, and who or what is not, making for yet another similarity between the colonial and post-colonial discourses.

Messages of unity that emanate from the decision-making centres and their agents of government silence questions of cultural diversity and confiscate memories, ensuring there is no public recognition of the socio-political importance of the country’s ethnic groups.

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