

Hispanic and Lusophone Voices of Africa

edited by

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and

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Canadian Center for Diversity and Inclusion

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Introduction

David Mongor-Lizarrabengoa

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This volume began life as a panel proposal for the 2019 Northeast Modern Language (NeMLA) Convention hosted by Georgetown University. When choosing panel topics of the NeMLA conventions, I typically choose a topic that often is underrepresented in Hispanic and/or Lusophone literary and film scholarship, but with this approach, there are usually fewer submissions than for a panel on a more mainstream topic. After some debate, I opted for a panel titled “Hispanic and Lusophone Literatures of Africa.” Equatorial Guinea was grouped in with the Lusophone nations on the continent as I worried that without its inclusion, I would not receive enough proposals to run the panel. To my complete surprise, over ten submissions were received which forced the panel to be broken into two sessions, one on Lusophone Africa and another just on Equatorial Guinea. At the conference, both panels were well-received by the audience with one person commenting that in the twenty-five years he had been attended the NeMLA convention, he was amazed that for the first time, there had been a panel dedicated exclusively to Equatorial Guinean literature. With such positive reception, I knew this topic needed to be explored further as there is definitely a gap in this area of academic publishing. Shortly after the conference, a representative from Vernon Press reached out to me asking if I would be willing to edit a volume on my conference topic to which I gladly accepted the task.

If one were to search courses in Spanish and Portuguese graduate and undergraduate programs in the United States, the lists of courses offered will likely contain numerous courses on Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and the other major nations in Latin America. Equatorial Guinea and Lusophone African countries may not appear at all, and if they do, there may only be one or two courses covering the literature, cinema, and linguistics of these nations. With regard to Equatorial Guinea, it is the only African nation where Spanish is an official language with about 68% of the population being fluent in it. When people think of countries where Spanish is spoken, they usually think of Spain and some Latin American states, completely oblivious to the fact a Spanish-speaking nation exists in Africa. Prior to the 1990s, volumes of literature written in Spanish rarely featured Equatorial Guinean writers. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* and a few international conferences helped to expose members of the academic community to scholarship on writers from Equatorial Guinea. In

terms of cinema production, the country has not been known for its film industry. In 2014, the first international feature film shot in Equatorial Guinea, *Where the Road Runs Out* premiered at the San Diego International Film Festival, winning two awards. Since then there have been a handful of new films produced in the nation. If directors and filmmakers in the nation receive government support and can find funding resources elsewhere, the nation has the potential to create a small-scale film industry that could produce very unique films compared to the output of Spain and Latin American countries.

In terms of Lusophone Africa, Angola boasts approximately twenty million¹ speakers of Portuguese. In Mozambique, there are about 12 million Portuguese speakers. Cabo Verde is home to about 500,000 Lusophones. Roughly 950,000 residents of Guinea-Bissau can speak Portuguese. Lastly, Portuguese is spoken by about 120,000 citizens of the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe.² Undoubtedly, Brazil is by far home to the most speakers of Portuguese with over 200 million, but when compared to Portugal's 10 million speakers, the five African nations comprise a sizeable chunk of the world's Lusophone population. Whereas Equatorial Guinean writers struggled to gain recognition in the academic world, Lusophone African writers have not experienced as much adversity as there have been a handful of volumes published on Luso-African works along with many journal articles. Despite this exposure amongst the research community, there is still a need to research and explore the voices that emerge from the five Lusophone nations in Africa.

This book seeks to explore literary texts and films from Equatorial Guinea and Portuguese-speaking Africa: Angola, Mozambique, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe. While fiction and film operate using different discourses, they both involve storytelling, character development, and thematic messages so there is some overlap. In the case of the nations represented in the volume, many do not have extensive film production histories; hence, both film and fiction are presented in this text. This volume has two principal aims. First, this book seeks to acquaint readers that speak English with works of fiction and films from these six African nations. Secondly, this volume adds to the scholarship already published on Equatorial Guinea and Lusophone Africa. As stated, these nations have often been overshadowed by the major players in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world. This volume is not an exhaustive study of the literature or film production of these

¹ The figures in this paragraph include native speakers of the language, those that speak Portuguese-based creole languages, and residents who speak Portuguese fluently as a second language.

² Portuguese is also a co-official language in Equatorial Guinea, but it is not widely spoken there.

nations. The various authors have chosen to work with more contemporary works that were written/filmed in Spanish and Portuguese. While the various chapters may mention texts and literary movements from the past, the emphasis is placed on post-independence works. In addition, no texts or movies made in the numerous indigenous African languages of these nations are featured.

The essays contained in this volume highlight some of the most important texts and films to be produced in Equatorial Guinea and Lusophone Africa. The authors of these chapters come from diverse academic backgrounds so there are different ways the texts and films are engaged. Each chapter explores one or more texts/films, the social context surrounding the society it represents, and its reception by the public. In the first chapter, Sarita Addy examines Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), one of the most well-known and widely read narratives about Equatorial Guinea. The novel offers a sharp, candid criticism of colonial and postcolonial systems of oppression in Equatorial Guinea. The novel's evocation of resistance against the authoritarianism of the Nguemist regime also encompasses what resistance meant to the allies of the dictator. In this chapter, she analyzes, Ada, a female paramilitary officer who is complicit with the dictator, and argues that her alliance with the dictator within the social and political degeneration of Nguema's Equatorial Guinea is a kind of resistance against neo-colonialism and traditional Fang patriarchy. While the novel frames her resistance as anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal sentiments are revealed that point to double oppression from both Nguemist and colonialist ideologies of the Guinean woman.

The remaining chapters in the volume engage texts and films from Lusophone Africa. The second chapter, written by Paulo Rodrigues Ferreira, analyzes *Comissão das Lágrimas* (2011), a novel by Lobo Antunes focusing on Angola. Having served as a military doctor in the Portuguese Colonial War, it is no surprise that he has written extensively about the downfall of Portugal's colonial presence in Africa. Ferreria seeks to examine how Antunes engages colonial and postcolonial ideas with specific emphasis on how one's experiences impact memories of past events. In his discussion of *Comissão das Lágrimas*, he explores the mentally challenged character, Cristiana, who is traumatized by her past and recounts the horrors carried out by her father, a member of the so-called Comissão das Lágrimas. Supposedly, an organization was created in 1977 to persecute and arrest the intellectuals involved in a failed coup to overthrow Agostinho Neto's government. The chapter seeks to answer several key questions including: how do Lobo Antunes's literary techniques help him to recount historical events? How can fiction help readers to

apprehend the complexities of history? What are the frontiers between reality and fiction in his oeuvre, especially in *Comissão das Lágrimas*?

The third chapter, by Martha Mzite and Margret Chipara, offers a comparative analysis of gender roles in selected works of fiction by Lília Momplé and Paulina Chiziane of Mozambique and Ana Paula Tavares of Angola with a specific focus on the representation of men and the ideas of masculinity. They draw on numerous aspects of postcolonial, feminist, and gender theories to examine concepts such as the patriarchal male, representations of the male body and sexuality, behavior, and relationships with the hopes of concluding how female Lusophone writers engage manliness, the male body, and gender roles.

Chapter four marks the transition to Afro-Lusophone films. Joseph Levi examines post-colonial identities in the cinema of Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé & Príncipe. He argues that the cinema of Lusophone Africa has not been a major focus among the academic community. Despite many financial and technical challenges, he shows how African directors and ones from Europe living in Lusophone Africa manage to convey the very essence of life in Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé & Príncipe and provide audiences insights on how to view and interpret the postcolonial identity in these two nations. In chapter five, Daniel da Silva also explores the cinema of São Tomé & Príncipe. In his chapter, he provides a brief overview of colonial and postcolonial film production in the island nation until 2000. Then, he examines how subsequent generations of filmmakers, harnessing different modes of dissemination and consumption, have radically revised the imagery of exoticism and essentialization that characterized colonial film and much of postcolonial production circuted to metropolitan consumption.

In chapter six, Patricia Ferreira explores the representation of orphans and the ways in which they either succumb to their social and political environment or have to adapt to it in two Lusophone films *Hollow City* (2004) by Maria João Ganga and *República di Mininus* (2012) by Flora Gomes which, with a contrasting approach, highlight a trajectory of loss and a trajectory of redemption. Ganga portrays Luanda as an urban space, derived from the emptiness of societal values and the lack of good role models, and contrasts it with Gomes's optimistic reinvention of society. She argues that the destruction and emptiness portrayed in *Republica de Mininus* are seen as inevitable to a much-desired rebirth of postcolonial African societies. Through this comparative analysis, she argues that Gomes' utopian project is rooted in a positive view of orphanhood, whereas Ganga's defeatist project conceives of the state of being an orphan as fatal.

The final chapter in this volume explores the relationship between text and film. My analysis explores the Cabo Verdean novel *O Testamento do Senhor*

Napumoceno da Silva Araújo by Germano Almeida and the film adaptation directed by Francisco Manso. The goal of this chapter is not to propose a new way in which scholars can examine a source text and its film adaptation; rather, drawing on Robert Stam's ideas of intertextuality, I examine what one can learn about a literary text based on its film adaptation. In my analysis, issues such as race, gender, and sexuality are explored along with aspects of film production, such as how making a co-produced film can impact the way the source text is portrayed on screen.

Together, these chapters demonstrate the literary and film production coming out of Hispanic and Lusophone Africa. Given advances in technology that have made it easier to publish texts and stream films online, the cultural production in these nations will likely flourish in years to come. The aim of this book is to contribute to the scholarship of these nations that have been overlooked by the academic community to varying degrees. In doing so, a wider audience can appreciate and gain new perspectives on the texts and films featured here.

Chapter 1

Trapped in the Closet: Complicity as Resistance in Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997)

Sarita Naa Akuye Addy

Canadian Center for Diversity and Inclusion

Abstract

Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) is one of the most studied narratives about Equatorial Guinea. Its relativity to a wide readership hinges on its candid criticism of the colonial and postcolonial systems of oppression. The novel's evocation of resistance against the authoritarianism of the Nguemist regime also encompasses what resistance meant to the allies of the dictator. In this chapter, I discuss the controversial character, Ada, a female paramilitary officer who is complicit with the dictator. I argue that her alliance with the dictator within the social and political degeneration of Nguema's Equatorial Guinea is a kind of resistance against neo-colonialism and traditional Fang patriarchy. While the novel frames her resistance as anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal sentiments are revealed that point to a double oppression from both Nguemist and colonialist ideologies of the Guinean woman.

Keywords: Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Nguema

* * *

After independence from European colonialism, authoritarian rule has been a recurring *topos* in contemporary African novels that depict the 1970s. As many of these novels have shown, these dictatorships have proven to undermine the decolonizing agendas of many African countries. They have generally come to symbolize the consequences of overvaluing independence by placing utopian expectations on new governments. In addition to their brutally suppressive style of ruling, dictatorships and their language of violence expose the

ideological limitations of nationalist movements in responding to the needs of their newly formed countries. Like the nationalisms that preceded them, dictatorships are conceptualized as masculine and respond mainly to the aspirations of the disenfranchised male figure post-independence. The exponential critic of the Equatorial Guinean narrative, Joseph Otabela (2004), observes that within the dictatorship novel of the seventies, there is a hypersexuality associated with the figure of the dictator, and this trait is emblematic of his absolute power and control over both public and private affairs (35). This de facto association of authoritarianism with power and sexuality provokes a gendered inquiry into questions of feminine subjectivity, compliance, and resistance under this system of governance. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*,¹ is panoramic in its exposé of life in Equatorial Guinea under its first president and dictator, Macías Nguema.² While it exposes the continuities of the systems of oppression and emits a discourse of resistance against the legacies of Spanish colonialism and the Nguema regime, it also shows what resistance means to those complicit with the dictator.

My reading of this text focuses on the character Ada, the female paramilitary officer who represents the dictator, Macías Nguema, within the novel.³ Ada's position as a high-ranking officer and Nguema's ally is a catalyst for critically examining the interlocking nature of female political and cultural resistance. Her presence transmits the virulent and violent ethnocentric nationalism that the Nguema regime imposed nationwide to erase the Spanish cultural colonial legacy. She rejects the metaphoric and symbolic feminine roles within the discourse of nationalism as the biological reproducers of the nation and the transmitters of national culture in order to usurp the hypersexuality associated with dictators. This compels a critical inquiry into the avenues available to women to resist the gendered colonial and traditional cultural expectations

¹ *Los poderes de la tempestad*, published in 1997 is the second installment in the trilogy, *Los hijos de la tribu*. It is the sequel to Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's first novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987).

² Francisco Macías Nguema was the first elected president of Equatorial Guinea after Spanish colonialism. From 1968 to 1979, Guinea was thrown into a violent and sanguinary dictatorship. Critics widely refer to his dictatorship *Nguemism*, a particular brand of authoritarianism in which he and his close allies arbitrarily governed the country. His administration was also characterized by the silencing and exile of intellectuals, incarcerations, and mass killings. The Swiss historian, Max Liniger-Goumaz (1988) estimates that approximately 125,000 citizens, which was about a quarter of the country's population, went into exile in neighbouring African countries and in Spain (56).

³ Several arguments within the discussion in this chapter has been modified from a doctoral thesis.

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About the Contributors

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Dr. Sarita Naa Akuye Addy holds a doctorate degree in Hispanic Studies from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. Dr. Addy's works to date can be summed as an exercise in highlighting marginalized African voices and experiences in the African diaspora. Her research work at the doctoral level explored the personal colonial and postcolonial histories of Equatorial Guineans through the novels of Guinean authors living in exile to understand the impact of colonialism on African dictatorship regimes, such as that in Equatorial Guinea.

Her future research works will be focusing on the notions of gender and sexuality in the works of Equatorial Guinea's female authors and would like to explore women's perceptions and reactions to Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea. For the time being, she has turned her attention to anti-racism through her work with the Canadian Center for Diversity and Inclusion.

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Paulo Rodrigues Ferreira

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Daniel F. Silva

Daniel F. Silva is Associate Professor of Luso-Hispanic Studies and Director of the Black Studies Program at Middlebury College, where he is also Director of the Twilight Project and a fellow at the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity as well as a contributing member of the International and Global Studies Program. He is the author of *Embodying Modernity: Race, Gender, and Fitness Culture in Brazil* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022), *Anti-Empire: Decolonial Interventions in Lusophone Literatures* (Liverpool University Press, 2018), and *Subjectivity and the Reproduction of Imperial Power: Empire's Individuals* (Routledge, 2015). He is also the co-editor of *Decolonial Destinies: The Post-Independence Literatures of Lusophone Africa* (Anthem Press, Forthcoming); *Emerging Dialogues on Machado de Assis* (Palgrave, 2016); and *Lima Barreto: New Critical Perspectives* (Lexington Books, 2013). He is co-editor of the book series, Anthem Studies in *Race, Power, and Society* with Anthem Press; and has published scholarship in *Hispania*, *Chasqui*, and *Transmodernity* while also contributing to several edited volumes.

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