

The Shattered Mirror: Colonial Discourse and Counterdiscourse about Spanish Guinea¹

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The function of reading literature, according to Fredric Jameson, is “the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts” (20). Abdul R. JanMohamed applies and expands Jameson’s theories, among others, to explain the underlying tensions in post-colonial African literature:

The dialectic of negative influence is in fact a literary manifestation of the Manichean socio-political relation between the colonizer and the colonized. The black writer finds that colonialist praxis and literature promote a negative, derogatory image of Africa and its inhabitants, and thus he is motivated to attempt a correction of that image through a symbolic, literary re-creation of an alternate, more just picture of indigenous cultures. (8)

In order to better understand the efforts by certain contemporary Equatorial Guinean authors to correct this distorted image and create one that instead truly reflects their identity, it may be helpful to revisit the different images of black Africans projected by Spanish colonial discourse. In this essay, I present an overview of ambivalent, sometimes ambiguous and even contradictory images of Spanish Guinean subjects in a variety of colonial texts. I will examine both literary and non-literary sources from Spain in the twentieth century, placing a special emphasis on the genres and texts that have been mostly overlooked by previous scholars. Finally, I propose to interpret the motif of the mirror, present in some of these texts, as a trope that symbolizes the diverse

and occasionally conflicting images of the black African as a colonial subject.

Spanish colonial fiction, as well as the travel literature related to the former colony, has been studied recently by Antonio M. Carrasco González (221-55). He devotes a chapter of his book to twentieth-century Spanish prose, since there are very few works related to Spanish Guinea in the previous century due to the remoteness of the area for Europeans and the difficult and perilous access from the metropolis (221-22).² The first study of Spanish novels and poems linked to Spanish Guinea starting in the 1920s, by Carlos González Echeagaray, was published in 1964. He revised and expanded his early contribution twenty-five years later. Both scholars choose to concentrate on those literary genres, leaving theater and other texts that are not strictly literary outside the scope of their inquiry.

Carrasco states that there is only one known play about Spanish Guinea, *Bajo el sol de Guinea*, by Bartolomé Soria Marco (233).³ However, there is at least another play that deals explicitly with the colony as its central topic: Alejandro Cervantes's *El puritano*, which Carrasco does not mention. *El puritano* (1945) is still unpublished and remains largely unknown.⁴ It is a well-intentioned drama that denounces racism and discrimination of Spanish Guineans and condemns the moral hypocrisy of Spaniards, although it does not question the legitimacy of colonialism. It also contains an interesting use of the trope of the mirror, which I will examine later.

Besides the above-mentioned genre gap in colonial studies related to Spanish Guinea, with a noticeable scarcity of studies on theater, there are certain periods and a number of non-literary texts that have not received substantial critical attention yet.⁵

For instance, Carrasco does not include the colonial literature produced during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in his otherwise well-documented study. He does mention an anti-republican work of propaganda, *Estupendos misterios de la Guinea Española*, by Eladio Antonio Rebolloa, which is a satirical novel written in the early years of the Second Republic (231-32).

The chronological gap in Carrasco's essay is partially covered in *La voz de los naufragos*, a study of the personal testimonies and memoirs written by exiled Republicans during or after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). This book, by Gemma Mañá and others, includes a chapter on the testimonies related to the Spanish colonies in Africa, such as Ifni, Spanish Sahara and the Morocco protectorate. The part dealing with Spanish Guinea offers a detailed summary of a little-known testimonial narrative, *Guinea mártir*, by the republican Ángel Miguel Pozanco, a colonial officer who fled Spanish Guinea a few months after the 1936 military coup (123-29). Unfortunately, an analysis of the text beyond the plot summary is lacking. Both this book and Carrasco's are limited to a specific literary genre, narrative, so other genres and non-literary texts such as comics, postcards, posters, etc. are excluded from their scope.

From the narrative texts studied by Carrasco, we may infer an image of Spanish Guineans as the exotic, primitive Other that seems to dominate these texts, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century. The characteristics that the European travelers find more striking in the costumes and traditions of the indigenous people—nudity, ritual cannibalism, polygamy, witchcraft—serve as a justification for the civilizing role of the colonizers. The same litany is repeated not only by causal

observers but also by alleged scientists. It is a continuation of the pseudo-scientific discourse of the *africanistas*, the intellectual community of geographers, ethnologists and other scientists who gave ideological support to the Spanish colonial enterprise at the turn of the nineteenth century. Gustau Nerín has collected numerous examples of racist discourse in a variety of Spanish non-literary texts through most of the twentieth century (43-48). These examples contradict the apparent benevolence and lack of prejudices of the Spanish colonizers, a myth that the official discourse of Franco's government tried to perpetuate in the last period of the African colony.⁶

All practices considered immoral, pagan or uncivilized were banned in the Spanish colony. Despite strict regulations, however, it seems that the Spaniards were largely unsuccessful in their attempts to eradicate polygamy, for instance. Contemporary testimonies by missionaries, administrative reports and colonial and post-colonial literature reflect the resistance of the native population (Bonelli 191; Nosti 46; Yglesias 60-63).

Nerín has documented a number of failed attempts in the long struggle to convert the Spanish Guinean population to Catholicism and to impose monogamy (29-32). In María Nsue Angüe's *Ekomo*, a post-colonial novel published in 1985, Oyono is a polygamist whose decision to convert to Catholicism creates unbearable tension among his four wives and threatens to create havoc in his household. The elder of the village reproaches Oyono for his foolishness, since the whites' house in heaven is not meant for Africans: "Si os dejan entrar en el cielo, sólo sería para criados o para esclavos" (368).

The resistance to forced religious conversion and cultural assimilation, registered by European observers, was not always overt. It often took the form of mimicry, as

defined by Homi Bhabha (87-89). The narrator in Buenaventura Vidal's novel, *La danza de los puñales*, published in 1925, complains that the natives pretend to abandon their old ways for the benefit of the white colonists, but actually continue with their traditions, including polygamy (27).⁷ A complex, multi-layered type of mimicry is represented by the narrator's father and, in part, by the narrator himself in Donato Ndong-Bidyogo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), arguably the best-known post-colonial novel by an Equatorial Guinean author.⁸

The Spanish Guinean subjects' refusal to change completely their traditional way of life was used by colonial writers to reinforce the stereotype of Africans as lascivious, promiscuous and morally weakened creatures. As Carrasco points out, a paternalistic attitude and a convenient oversight of abuse committed by whites were prevalent in colonial literature dealing with Spanish Guinea, regardless of the ideological orientation of the writers from the metropolis (221, 226-27, 235).

The Spanish writers in the first decades of the twentieth century were convinced defenders of the colonial enterprise (Carrasco 29), even when they lamented the alleged moral corruption of the natives after their contact with Europeans: "Han perdido mucho en salvajismo, pero lo han ganado en hipocresía social" (Vidal 27). The ambivalence is also visible in other writers of the prewar period who show a certain tension between the attraction of the "wild" life in the jungle and the belief in the civilizing mission of Europeans, whose very goal is the imposition of Western culture even if it means the destruction of the Africans' way of life.

Despite a certain fascination for the jungle, Spanish colonial writers did not seem

to believe in the myth of the noble savage, unlike other European writers of their period. They were not inclined to “go native” either.⁹ On the contrary, they were firmly convinced of the inferiority of the African cultures they encountered and the need to bring Western civilization to the primitive “savages.” As presented in their texts, the superiority of Europeans is a token that allows them to trick and take advantage of the naïve and superstitious blacks from the Spanish colony (Carrasco 230).

The presence of the Spaniards themselves is not necessary to show the superiority of their civilization, in contrast with the primitive and naïve mentality that they attribute to their colonial subjects. In a short story by the Spanish writer José Más, published in the early 1920s, a remote village in Spanish Guinea is agitated by the arrival of an unknown object, a mirror.¹⁰ It causes such a disturbance that the people in the village decide to destroy it. However, when they try to break it into pieces, it multiplies magically, much to their consternation. The omniscient narrator adds:

Los restos de aquel objeto que había despertado en ellos el anhelo de tantas cosas desconocidas aún, pero presentidas tal vez, les torturaba el cerebro [...]. La hora de la civilización había sonado ya en la selva. (13)

The trope of the mirror in colonial fiction has been associated with the European hero’s search for identity (Low 66; Brantlinger 217). Bhabha has applied the Lacanian concept of the Imaginary, linked to the formative mirror phase, to a mode of representation, the stereotype, which he views as the dominant strategy of colonial discourse that “gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks

it” (77).¹¹ The trope may take different forms, some more unsettling than others, but the white hero’s gaze remains a central component. For instance, in an inversion of the Narcissus myth, as Torgovnick states (47), the hero of *Tarzan of the Apes*, the best-selling novel by Burroughs, feels inferior when he sees his reflection in a pool for the first time and compares himself to the apes (36).

In colonial discourse, as Spurr has pointed out, the gaze of the observer “marks an exclusion as well as a privilege,” as blacks are objects of observation, but are not allowed to look back at their white masters:

They are obligated to show themselves *to view* for the white men, but they themselves lack the privilege of the gaze; though looked at, they are forbidden from looking back [...]. Gazed upon, they are denied the power of the gaze. (13)

In Más’s story, the trope of the mirror takes a highly unusual turn. This symbolic object does not reflect the gaze of the colonizer in search of his or her identity, as we normally find in colonial fiction. Instead, it is clearly presented as an instrument of colonial domination, a symbol of the colonizer that disrupts the traditional social order when it forces the colonized people to see their own reflection.

While the arrival of the mirror in the story prefigures the defeat of the African community by the whites and precipitates the process of acculturation, it presupposes the ability of the colonized to see his or her own reflection. Although perhaps unintentionally, this narrative concedes the possibility that the colonial subject in Spanish Guinea may actually become the gazer instead of the mere object of desire. The instability in the text

opens the door for a subversive interpretation in which the African subject may become an agent rather than a subaltern Other.

The colonial mentality that underlines the previously mentioned texts, despite their instabilities, can be found even in progressive, leftist writers such as Pozanco, the author of *Guinea mártir*, who never questions the supposed inability for self-determination of the colonized people in Spanish Guinea. On the contrary, before the war broke out, he seemed exclusively concerned with the improvement of the administrative system in order to make the colony more efficient and profitable. It appears that his democratic ideals did not extend to the blacks in the Spanish colony.

There are no studies of the nationalist propaganda literature written in the colony or related to Spanish Guinea during the Spanish Civil War. Although there does not seem to be any literary text on the topic, and certainly there is no canonical work written by Franco's supporters in or about the colony at that time, blacks are indeed represented in a very insidious way in war propaganda literature. Specific mentions of black Africans are scarce, however. For example, there are racist attacks against president Negrín (based on infantile puns about his last name) in some articles written by journalists from the opposite side.¹²

Typically, the racism against black Africans is more subtle, unlike the obvious racist stereotyping and often vicious attacks against "Orientals," Jews and other groups in the propaganda literature of the nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. It is encoded in the negative associations of darkness and evil, a recurrent motif of Western art and literature, especially since the nineteenth century (Boime 1-5). The Manichean an-

tithesis of dark evil versus white goodness is explicit in *Y el imperio volvía...* (1939), an allegoric play by the Jesuit priest Ramón Cue, which constitutes a strident example of crude racism and xenophobia. In a scene of this play, Spain, represented by a flock of white doves, destroys the Turkish Empire, symbolized by a flock of black vultures "from the Orient."¹³

Since the war was often cast on both sides as an apocalyptic struggle between Western civilization and the racial Other represented as the barbaric and savage invader of Spain, it was not unusual to accuse the political enemies of racial impurity or even characterize them as the ultimate aliens, members of one of the "degenerate" or "inferior" races.¹⁴ North Africans or "moors," which supported Franco in the war, were the main targets of the racist propaganda produced by the loyalists, whereas Asians or "Orientals" (identified with the Russian "reds") and Jews were typically the chosen objects of hatred of the Nationalist rebels.

Some war posters or other propaganda drawings distributed by the Republicans portrayed the much-feared Moroccan troops that fought with Franco as black, or at least with rather dark skin and some exaggerated features usually associated with caricatures of black Africans, following a trend already exploited in the Spanish-Moroccan war in the 1920s.¹⁵ By contrast, the image of the heroic Moroccan soldier was systematically whitened in propaganda drawings and paintings created by Franco's supporters (Martín 392). While the "moors" were elevated to the category of the noble savage in many written texts in Nationalist Spain, especially in the propaganda press, the Republican Commissariat of Propaganda of the Generalitat (the autonomous government

of Catalonia) published and distributed flyers with illustrated stories, called "aucas" in Catalan or "aleluyas" in Spanish, in which "savage" moors were sometimes portrayed as black.¹⁶

Besides the above-mentioned examples, which draw indirect associations with the colonial subjects in Guinea because of their negative stereotyping of black Africans,¹⁷ there is a striking illustrated story published in Spain during the war that takes place explicitly in Spanish Guinea. It was intended for children, mostly boys, who were the targeted readers of the Fascist magazine *Flechas*.¹⁸ The story, entitled "Negreros rojos," takes the ostensible form of an escapist adventure in an exotic land, following the fashion introduced by U.S. comics in the 1930s. It is skillfully drawn and printed in color, an expensive enterprise in war-torn Spain, where paper was so scarce that it was rationed. However, the message is transparently Manichean. It purports to represent the fascist rebels as the saviors of the Spanish Guineans, portrayed as a mixture of the good savage and Uncle Tom, a helpless victim waiting to be liberated from his oppressors, the Republican loyalists, by the white hero.

The protagonist of the adventure series is Gustavo el Aventurero, a blond, Aryan-looking boy wearing the Falange uniform, the Spanish Fascist party blue shirt with Isabella and Ferdinand's coat of arms. He fights bravely against the sadistic villains, who are both illegal arms dealers and slave traffickers in Guinea. They also happen to be Republicans or "reds" and are portrayed as a cross of fairy tale ogres and hideous criminals, a common representation in children's magazines from the Nationalist faction.¹⁹ In the end, good prevails over evil and the handsome white boy frees

the grateful blacks from slavery. Like the relationship of Tarzan (the most popular comic hero of the 1930s) with the fictitious African tribe of the noble Waziri, the story is typical of Western writing about Africa, since it is "a fantasy of Western superiority being voluntarily recognized and rewarded by 'natives'" (Torgovnick 57).

This Manichean vision of Franco's political enemies and the distorted vision of the role of the new military regime in Spanish African colonies were part of the indoctrination process that Spanish children underwent for several generations, both in the peninsula and in Spanish Guinea.²⁰ Although it ran counter to the reality of African colonial society under Franco's dictatorship, it was perpetuated in the official discourse for decades.²¹ It permeated the minds of the colonized, not without tensions and contradictions, as shown in Ndongo-Bidyogo's first novel *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987).

The narrator in the novel reminisces about his childhood in the Spanish colony. A former student in a public school for blacks in Spanish Guinea, he recalls the fear of the red-skinned Republicans his black teacher instilled in him, in stark contrast with the portraits of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of Falange Española and the martyr of the Spanish Nationalist cause, and General Franco, the alleged savior of Spain and liberator of the enslaved blacks. Both were displayed prominently on the classroom wall next to the icon of another white savior, Jesus on the cross. The child feels both fascinated and intimidated by the gaze of this White Man's trinity.

The condescending, paternalistic attitude toward the colonized and the exalted language used by the teacher and echoed by the diligent pupil, correspond with the

official discourse found in school textbooks and political speeches of the postwar period:

Nunca olvidaré esa mirada severa [...] que [...] me obligaba a ser agradecido hacia Ese Hombre que nos había traído la Verdadera Libertad que los sindiós nos quisieron arrebatar esclavizándonos con engaños y asechanzas materialistas, esos sindiós que formaban una raza especial de hombres malvados pintados de rojo. (27)²²

The assertion that the “Reds” or Spanish Republicans were “savages” and “barbarians,” repeated *ad nauseam* in the official discourse during Franco’s regime, appears to be internalized by the colonial subject in Ndongo-Bidyogo’s novel, the black child attending an elementary school in Spanish Guinea.²³ In an ironic mode that seems to take the perspective of the naïve seven-year-old boy, the narrator remembers his teacher’s indignation, caused by

la barbarie de las hordas de los hombres de piel roja que quemaban iglesias y conventos con monjas dentro y todo, algo que jamás había hecho ningún infiel como nosotros, esos sí que eran salvajes de verdad. (29)

The black teacher in *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* has made an unexpected inversion, perhaps unintentionally: it turns out some of the whites (conveniently named “the reds”) are the true savages, the infidels, capable of evil deeds that no African pagan would commit. His indignation toward abuses and violent crimes against the Catholic Church in the Second Spanish Republic leads him to reposition the colonial subject, now morally superior to those European barbarians. However, this inver-

sion is still done from a paternalistic vision of the noble savage, internalized by the collaborator of the colonialists, a civil servant of the metropolis.

The African teacher from colonial times portrayed in Ndongo-Bidyogo’s novel does not question the Europeans’ right to colonize his homeland, but criticizes some of them for not living up to the high moral standards that are expected from a superior, civilized race. He has clearly constructed an ideal image of the Other while at the same time being very conscious of the colonial subjects’ image that the white men have perpetuated, tied to their respective role and the racial hierarchy in the colony.

A similarly double-edged and potentially unstable message can be found in a 1945 play by the Spanish dramatist Alejandro Cervantes entitled *El puritano*. The play offers an unusually severe indictment of the hypocrisy and racism of the white upper and middle classes who benefited from the exploitation of the colonies. Not surprisingly, Cervantes’s drama encountered difficulties with the rigid censors of postwar Spain and was never performed nor published.²⁴

El puritano presents the conflict of a young African woman of mixed race who tries to pass as white in Spain while in search of a better life. In the end she finds social acceptance when she is recognized by her Spanish father, but only after it is revealed that her biological mother was white, although her adoptive mother is black. The other African characters trying to help the protagonist are rejected by the white characters in the play. After they endure racial discrimination, humiliating treatment and constant verbal abuse, they decide to return to the colony, sadly convinced that there is no place for them in the metropolis.

Like the black teacher in *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (although for very different reasons) the Africans in this play are outraged by the whites' immoral and brutal behavior and expose them as hypocrites and corrupt profiteers, Christian only in name. They force the spectator to reexamine his or her assumption about racial and moral superiority by inverting the traditional terms in the colonizing process: the whites are accused of being the non-Christian and impure ones by the colonial subjects. The play is ironically entitled *El puritano* in a reference to the heroine's biological father, a self-righteous, white character who finally admits to having had an illicit relationship with an African woman whom he later abandoned.

The main rhetorical strategy used by the African characters in the play is the appropriation of the religious discourse brought to Spanish Guinea by the missionaries, an important colonizing force in the Spanish colony, as has been often pointed out by scholars (Avome 81-82, Fegley 24-2, Fra-Molinero 50, Fryer 7, Nsue 62-65, Salafranca 279). The symmetrical inversion of traditional terms, as in a mirror image, subversively returns to whites their accusations of savagery, impurity and paganism by applying to them the strict moral standards that white missionaries preached to the African subjects.

The ambiguous trope of the colonial mirror, used two decades earlier in Más's story from his book *El fetichero blanco*, also takes an interesting twist in Cervantes's play. In a key scene of *El puritano*, the Spanish Guinean Tomás looks at his reflection in a mirror and sees himself for the first time as the white characters in the play see him. He walks away from the mirror, crying silently (95).²⁵ This particular use of the trope

departs dramatically from the typical one in which the European looks at the mirror and sees his more or less deformed reflection projected on the imaginary Other.

The underlying assumption in the traditional use of the symbolic mirror is that the colonial subject is incapable of self-reflection, since he or she can only ever be the object of the colonizer's gaze. However, in *El puritano* we find the "savage" painfully confronting the image that whites have constructed to represent him, an image he cannot accept as his true reflection but seems unable to change. Unlike the naïve villagers in Más's story, he does not try to break the mirror for he already knows it is a symbolic object that can reproduce his image *ad infinitum*.

The colonial mirror turns up again in several works by a post-colonial author previously mentioned, Ndongo-Bidyogo. The initial purpose of his first novel, which he defines as "a reflection," is to explain to himself and others "why we Guineans are where we are," as he said in a recent interview.²⁶ His experience in exile in Spain for nearly three decades has marked him deeply. He assures that he has learned what he knows about Africa and Equatorial Guinea through an intellectual process, not from life experience. As a result, he sees his works as marked by constant loneliness and evocation (112). He does not consider this fact to be necessarily negative since "La reflexión continua me permite ver las cosas con mayor objetividad, con menos pasión y más raciocinio" (114).

The reflecting mirror is a polysemic trope in Ndongo-Bidyogo's writings.²⁷ The constant element in all its different uses is its relation to the African characters, who are sometimes colonial subjects but are viewed from a post-colonial perspective.

They are definitely agents, not merely subalterns, even when they appear to be in a subordinate position. Ndongo-Bidyogo's main characters in his two novels and several of his short stories are mostly gazers, although they may be occasionally gazed upon. They are consistently inclined to self-reflection, an attribute still considered exclusive of the colonizers in a fairly recent past. The colonialists are the colonial Other and they are not the ones holding the mirror.

A complex use of the specular trope appears in *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*. In this novel, the Equatorial Guinean writer tried, in his own words,

to reflect the conflicts latent in our spirit between tradition and/or modernity, the identity of our people, [...] the portrait of the colonized as a substrate of our personality. ("La literatura moderna" 42)

In a pivotal episode of the novel, the narrator recalls a vision he had at age six after his circumcision ceremony. For the first time, he saw his great-grandfather, the leader of his village, fighting with the European invaders, who tried to shoot at him in vain. The objects they carried to impress the natives, such as mirrors and bead necklaces, were unexpectedly turned against the whites.

The Europeans are presented as grotesque and cowardly humanoids ("figuras humanoideas" 49-50), defeated by the great magical power of the African warrior, who commands nature and turns insects and inanimate objects against them. Fragments of a shattered mirror were splintered against their flesh, beads coiled around their hands, and a swarm of insects ate them up and left only their skeletons. When the child tells

his ancestor that he is looking for him, he reveals, "yo soy tú" (51). Then he realizes the vision has disappeared, but the spoils of the defeated "humanoids" are still there.

The vision functions as a powerful expression of resistance and shows the continuity between the fight of the great Fang warriors (who were ultimately dominated by the Europeans) and the child, whose mission will be to defeat the whites by learning the source of their power (133). The child later decides he will become a Catholic priest in order to acquire the power of their white magic. By the end of the novel, the child, now thirteen years old, is traveling to Spain with his mentor, Father Ortiz, in order to be educated. When he boards the boat, he looks at his own reflection in the fair eyes of the priest.²⁸

In his second novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), Ndongo-Bidyogo uses the trope of the self-reflecting mirror, now clearly appropriated by the post-colonial intellectual, who is no longer a subaltern. The second-person narrator laments the protagonist's lack of introspection when he returns to Equatorial Guinea after a prolonged exile in Spain:

Si hubieras tenido la serenidad suficiente para pensar en ti mismo, de analizarte, si hubieras podido contemplar tu alma en un espejo que te devolviera la imagen de tu espíritu atormentado. (116)

In conclusion, the trope of the mirror that appears in several Spanish texts dealing with the former colony, Equatorial Guinea, during the first half of the twentieth century, does not correspond exactly to the colonial trope in the European literature of that time. Moreover, it shows the cracks within colonial discourse. At least in a few texts, such

as Más's story and *El puritano*, the drama by Cervantes, some Spanish writers use the mirror as a symbol that represents how the colonial subjects see themselves in relation to the European colonizers. The results create tensions in an unstable system that is not as monolithic as it appears to be and open the possibility for a critical reflection on the supposedly fixed identity of both the colonist and the colonized.²⁹

In *El puritano*, a counter-discourse is established by exposing the contradictions of the colonial discourse of racial superiority in Spain. This is accomplished through the subversive appropriation of the religious discourse of the Spanish missionaries, inverting and challenging the traditional stereotypes of black Africans. In addition, the trope of the mirror allows for the representation of a colonial subject who is conscious of his or her unjust discrimination and marginalization by the Spaniards.

Finally, in the post-colonial writings of Ndong-Bidyogo, the appropriation and the reinscription of the specular trope show both the resistance to colonization and the reaffirmation of the autonomous identity of the former colonial subject, now viewed as that of an agent, even when situated within the historic context of the former colony. The "figuras humanoides" of his first novel were prefigured in several texts by writers of the Spanish colonial period although in Ndong they are condemned to failure, a loss of status that manifests what Bhabha calls the "disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (88). This process of the "gaze of otherness," in which, according to Bhabha, "the observer becomes the observed" (89), forces us to rearticulate the notion of identity, which can no longer be seen as a fixed, essentialist image.

The image of the Equatorial Guineans that emerges both in the colonial and the post-colonial texts analyzed in this essay is a conflicting and ambivalent one, as is colonial discourse itself, since it is in great part a result of the colonization process and a reaction to it. The resulting image is not monolithic, but split and even shattered.³⁰

Notes

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² Carrasco names a few authors of travel literature, memoirs, and scientific reports, mostly from the late nineteenth century (224-26), but does not provide titles nor other publication data, except for the novel, *Aventuras de un piloto en el Golfo de Guinea*, signed with the pen name Donacuíge (Madrid, 1886).

³ He does not analyze the play and does not say if it was performed. The data he includes in a footnote (Barcelona, 1945) is probably the place and date of the publication, but he does not mention the publisher.

⁴ For the only published study of *El puritano*, see Alás-Brun. Interestingly, Cervantes, a resident of Barcelona at that time, requested permission to perform his play in 1945, the same year the other play about Spanish Guinea was published or performed in Barcelona.

⁵ Since many Spanish plays remain unpublished, more archival research is needed. The

National Archives or AGA, in Spain, where I found the only known typescript of *El puritano*, are an invaluable source for the plays of Franco's period.

⁶ Nerín's book has been published in Spanish and Catalan. My references come from the Spanish edition, *Guinea Ecuatorial*.

⁷ Quoted in Carrasco 229. See Nerín for a thorough study on gender roles, changes in family structure and sexual relations and attitudes in Spanish Guinea from the second half of the nineteenth century to the independence of Equatorial Guinea in 1968.

⁸ The title of the novel, with echoes of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, comes from a quote by L. S. Senghor's *Chants d'ombre*. For an analysis of the ambiguous character of the narrator's father, see Fra-Molinero 60-61.

⁹ See Torgovnick's book for a thorough study of primitivism and Western writers' and artists' fascination with Africa. The Western tropes for the primitive are summarized on page 99.

¹⁰ Many drawings printed on postcards in the early decades of the twentieth century, such as some by Diego Mullor, show other Spanish colonial subjects, the *rifeños* from Northern Africa, surprised to see a mirror and other "modern" artifacts for the first time (Martín 384).

¹¹ According to Lacan's theories, the formation of the ego or subject "rests upon a basically paradoxical relationship between self and other" (Nichols 31).

¹² For instance, Julio Camba's article, "Negrín, negroide," published in the nationalist newspaper *ABC* in 1937, reprinted in Fernando Díaz-Plaja 742-43.

¹³ "Una bandada de buitres negros salió de Oriente" (Prólogo, leaf 4).

¹⁴ The symbolism is made explicit in Ramón Cue's play, *Y el imperio volvía...* (1939), which was not performed nor published. I found the typescript in the AGA archives.

¹⁵ See the illustrations from satirical postcards collected in Martín 386-89, especially the one titled, "El tango africano" (389), and the description of the cover for the 26 August 1921

issue of the satirical magazine, *L'Esquella de la Torratxa* (385).

¹⁶ See the examples mentioned in Martín 391-92, especially "Aleluyas de un soldado que combate a nuestro lado" (392).

¹⁷ For the racist stereotypes of Spanish Guineans perpetuated after the war in the educational system of Franco's regime, see Fra-Molinero 55.

¹⁸ *Flechas*, which started in November 1936, just a few months after the military coup, and *Pelayos*, another propaganda magazine for children published since December 1936, merged in December 1937 under the new title, *Flechas y Pelayos*, a children's magazine sponsored by Falange Española until its demise in 1949 (Conde 19-20, Otero 10-11).

¹⁹ Conde's ironic comments exposing the Manichean ideology behind *Pelayos* can also be applied to the stories published in *Flechas*. He points out that all the republicans portrayed in the illustrated magazine were communists or "reds," and "all the reds are ugly, dirty, and cruel" (20).

²⁰ Herzberger has studied the attempt to construct a monolithic hegemonic discourse about the essence of Spain and a teleological vision of history (33-37).

²¹ There were only one hundred freemen or *emancipados* out of a total population of one hundred thousand Africans in Spanish Guinea in the mid-1950s. The unemancipated Africans were "legal semiminors" and suffered many restrictions (Sundiata 33).

²² Even scholarly publications such as *Bibliografía General Española e Hispanoamericana* praised Franco as an epic hero (9) and presented him as "the providential man, [...] the savior of a marvelous culture" (Herzberger 19). More examples can be found in a collective volume published to commemorate Franco's trip to the Spanish colonies in Northern Africa in 1950, *Visita de SE el Jefe del Estado*, which includes several speeches by Franco and some articles in an ardent hagiographic tone.

²³ One of the most obvious examples of such demonization of the enemy is the book, *La*

barbarie roja, which proclaims to be an objective document, a collection of war photographs. However, beginning with the title and the provocative cover and continuing throughout the book, the anonymous author or authors systematically present the “reds” as monstrous, barbaric hordes of savages, bent on eliminating Christianity and destroying Western civilization.

²⁴ For a detailed description of the censors’ reports and the obstacles the author encountered when he tried to obtain permission to perform the play in Spain, see Alás-Brun 85-86.

²⁵ A typescript of the play submitted by the author (as required by the Spanish government during General Franco’s regime), along with the application to request permission for the performance and the censors’ reports, is kept in the Spanish National Archives (Archivo General de la Administración, or AGA) in Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid.

²⁶ “Mi propósito inicial fue explicar, explicarme a mí mismo—porque en verdad la primera novela es una reflexión—y a los demás el porqué los guineanos estamos como estamos” (“Donato Ndong-Bidyogo” 112).

²⁷ In a group of love poems, for instance, the speaker is so used to seeing his beloved in himself that she is transformed into the shadow of his mirror: “Te convertiste en la sombra de mi espejo. / Tan acostumbrado a verte en mí” (*Literatura* 292). There is a more traditional use of the trope of the mirror in the story, “El sueño,” where the waters of the river are like mirrors which reflect the nude bodies of the village girls (*Literatura* 204).

²⁸ The narrator, split in the second person, talks to his former self, the child: “El negro te depositó en el cayuco junto al padre Ortiz y te miraste en sus ojos claros” (163).

²⁹ According to Loomba, “colonial identities—on both sides of the divide—are unstable, agonised, and in constant flux. This undercuts both colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self” (178). Unlike Bhabha, who tends to universalize the colonial encounter, she warns

that we also need to take into consideration “questions of class, gender and context” (179).

³⁰ M’baré N’gom has pointed out that reality appears dislocated, fragmented and traumatized in the poetic discourse of the Equatorial Guinean exiles (22-23).

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