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**Between Three Continents: Rethinking Equatorial Guinea on the Fortieth
Anniversary of Its Independence from Spain**

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The Spanish language literature produced by Equatorial Guinean authors has become increasingly resistant

When presented with such a

Following on from the contradictions outlined by Brubaker and Cooper are a second set of contradictions that relate to the individual and the collective. The term 'identity' can be applied to both and raises questions regarding boundaries. Devereux describes identity as 'the absolute uniqueness' of an individual (1982: 42). Identity has also been coterminous with the concept of synthesis. Epstein explains that '[identity] represents the process by which the person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self' (1978: 101).²

The separation of collective and self implies the imposition of boundaries and the process of inclusion and exclusion. It will be demonstrated that in these novels, the individual experience is employed as a model that can be extended to the larger experience of the population. The process of establishing sameness and difference must occur in relation to an 'other'. This can take the form of an individual or a group, so long as the point of reference is outside the self. According to Hall, identification or the negotiation of identity is continuously 'in process' (1996: 2). Instead of marking sameness, it is more prevalent to construct identity through marking difference.³ Masolo describes this as 'a process to create the identity of the same through the discrimination of the Other' [capital in original] (1994: 182). The process of identification relates to the ability of the subjects to identify with some aspects and exclude themselves (or others) from what they feel is the 'majority identity' (Amselle, 1990: 24). Therefore, there is an active role for the subject in the

² In the subject area of psychology, Maslow describes the search for identity as 'becoming what one truly is'. This description highly linked to the individual sense of self (1970: 95).

³ Grossberg is much more firm on this point and argues that 'identity is always constituted out of difference' (1996: 93). This excludes the possibility of the identification of sameness.

representation of the geographical area surrounding Niefang on the mainland of Río Muni.

The references to Niefang and the surrounding areas can be extended to apply to other places within the country. Niefang is described as 'one of those Guinean cities...' (1996: 16). Another geographical location described in this manner is Edum which is 'one of those villages characteristic of the rural area of Niefang' (1996: 32). These types of descriptions allow for the narrative to gain a universal quality, a technique that is also employed with characters that will be examined shortly.

Niefang is also described as the meeting place of two cultures; the fang from the interior and the coastal population from the Litoral region. The cultural hybridity of this geographical space is significant as it is mirrored by Father Gabriel himself. Bacheng very clearly defines the relationship that Father Gabriel has with Niefang and it is arguably this close connection that allows for a similar description of both the man and the space (1996: 19).

Father Gabriel embodies cultural hybridity and all of the inherent contradictions specifically framed in a religious context. The reader is told that evil is black, dark and symbolic of darkness, whereas goodness is bright, Td(wheras)TjØ201T44Td003TjEM

as a symbol of the symbiosis of cultures, Father Gabriel is the union of both indigenous and European cultures through religion.

This hybridity of European, Catholic and indigenous traditions and practices is a common theme throughout the novel. The character of Ndong aids in the demonstration of this intersection. Similar to the description of geographic and The th

characterised by Father Gabriel, the combination of both traditions, becomes symbolic of the nation's identity as a whole (1996: 79). It can be argued that the characteristics of individual spaces and people have been provided in such a way by the author to allow them to be extended to the broader sphere. The hybridity inherent in Niefang is embodied by Father Gabriel who must accept his religious identity as a symbol of hope for the population.

Huellas bajo tierra or *Underground Footprints* was published in 1998. This narrative contains both historical and intertextual references that serve to anchor this text firmly in the tradition of contemporary writing. As observed by Marvin Lewis, the diary of Juan Ndong 'in combination with a variety of other narrative threads, provides a number of narrative perspectives that contribute to the metafictional structure of the work' (2007: 165). The framing of this narrative is significant as it mirrors the complexity of its content.

The diary is presented to the reader indirectly through the introduction to a Catalan character named Girolla given by an unidentified narrator. The diary entries become fictional testimony contained in historical events. The narrative runs parallel to the political development of the country as the protagonist experiences the pre and post Macias periods. The only information that the reader has concerning the unidentified character is that he is Equatorial Guinean. The fact that he remains anonymous is significant as it allows his experience to be extended to that of many others, a technique that has been illustrated in the previous text. The reader learns at the beginning of the text that the protagonist, Juan Ndong, has died in France and

it is this discovery that leads the reader to experience the diary through the unidentified character.

Bacheng presents Ndong's time in prison as a metaphor for the entire country during the Macias regime. The young Ndong states that an Equatorial Guinean learns many things while in prison. It is a veritable university of pain, suffering and death. The pivotal interaction in the text is an extensive exchange that occurs inside between the three characters who occupy the neighbouring cells: Father Gabriel, Patricio, a young intellectual and Nsue, a coffee farmer who voted against Macias in the elections (1998: 58 59).

A large portion of the text is dedicated to the debates between these men. It is not a coincidence that Father Gabriel appears as an intertextual reference in this novel. The link between the two novels becomes apparent as the informed reader learns that this part of the narration occurs prior to that of *The Parish Priest of Niefang*. This fact is significant as it allows the reader to gain a firm foothold in the elapsing time frame of the diary. It also serves as a reference point between the time period in the narration and the 'present' day in France. As well, the discussion between the three men contains many vital questions of religion and secularism, communism and democracy that concern Equatorial Guinean society. It can also be argued that each of these three men is representative of the types of people who were imprisoned during the Macias regime. The religious, the intellectual and the average man are all identified as subversive. This also demonstrates the arbitrary

nature of the convictions while at the same time presenting the reader with a selected cross section of the population.

While Father Gabriel and Patricio have extensive philosophical and religious debates, Nsue, who is representative of the status quo, offers a cautionary comment. He asks if either of them have ever considered what the average person wants. He states: those of you who

These preoccupations are quickly mirrored by the unidentified narrator. After having read the diary, he is plagued with questions concerning his identity: He states that he identifies with Juan Ndong to such an extent that he feels as though he was reading his own biography (1998: 99). This is the only sense of personal reflection that the reader receives from the unidentified character. He describes the diary as Juan Ndong having a profound dialogue with himself (1998: 99). This comment clarifies the structure of the novel as the diary acts as the perfect medium for the expression of this form of self interrogation.

The final section of the diary is presented as a letter to a woman named Christine. Juan Ndong outlines all of the difficulties of their relationship in terms that can be applied to the broader relationship between Africa and Europe. He describes their union as 'the sorrow between two identities' and laments irreconcilable cultural differences (1998: 104). In the letter, he underlines the importance of his ancestors and highlights his place within a long family tradition. His ancestral

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