

Lewis, Marvin A. *Equatorial Guinean Literature in its National and Transnational Contexts*. University of Missouri Press, 2017. 252 pp.

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The Spanish literary production of Equatoguinean authors is a small but vibrant pulse in the contemporary Spanish literary canon. Geographically, Equatorial Guinea inhabits a peripheral position within this canon; neither exactly Latin American nor Peninsular, work by Equatoguinean authors is often categorized under the broad umbrella of “Global Hispanism.” While this categorization is inclusive and speaks to the encompassing reach of the Spanish language, it is unfortunately too broad a category to be descriptive; an inquiring scholar can infer few clues from this term that would situate Equatoguinean literature within any useful context aside from its language of expression.

Marvin a. Lewis’s most recent book provides this much needed context as he traces some of the major literary, cultural, and historical connections that inform and inspire contemporary Equatoguinean literary production. His book displays the richness and variety of this Hispano-African literature through a consideration of a range of authors and genres. With this work, Lewis attempts to connect the dots between literary and cultural influences from myriad global sources.

This book is a logical complement to Lewis’ 2007 book (*An Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea: Between Colonialism and Dictatorship*, U of Missouri P) as it makes the step from introduction to contextualization. Lewis concluded the first book by considering the future of Equatoguinean letters, outlining the challenges ahead, and signaling the potentials for growth. This new work follows up on these considerations and finds a robust spectrum of works awaiting analysis. In the new volume, Lewis highlights sixteen works by thirteen authors, all published since 2007. Indeed, the quantity and scope of the works gathered for consideration speak to the growth and reach of the creative production by Equatoguinean authors. The critical awareness of and scholarship on Equatoguinean literature is still lacking, and works such as Lewis’s are timely and helpful for understanding the dynamics that propel continued literary production.

Within the focus on authors from Equatorial Guinea, Lewis includes a diverse selection. Many of the authors included are exiles in Spain or the United States, while some write in Equatorial Guinea, and some live in a combination of the two. Their political viewpoints differ, as do their literary interpretations of Equatoguinean life. Lewis highlights the inherent diversity of Equatorial Guinea

with authors of Annobonese, Bubi, Fang, and Ndowe descent, and likewise includes examples from Equatorial Guinea's islands and mainland regions. In addition, Lewis does not limit his considerations to one literary genre, but rather includes works of fiction prose, poetry, and drama as examples. The variety is rich and displays a clear dynamism of Equatoguinean literary production in Spanish. The authors examined include Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, Gerardo Behori Sipi Botau, Justo Bolekia Boleká, Juan Manuel Davies, Victoria Evita Ika, César Mba Abogo, Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng, Guillermina Mekuy, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, Maximiliano Nkogo Esono, José Fernando Siale Djangany, Recaredo Silebo Boturu, and Francisco Zamora Lobocho.

The book is organized thematically. It is divided into seven chapters, plus introduction and conclusion. Each chapter examines two or three works that support a theme. The seven chapters examine topics of transnationality, gender, fiction, dictatorships, language, class, and the urban center (Malabo). Emphasized in the introduction and surfacing frequently throughout the text are questionings of migration, diaspora, national, and transnational identities. This organization covers an array of topics that highlights the variety of Equatoguinean letters while also confirming its relevancy to contemporary social and political issues.

Lewis builds his argument on the assertion by Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng that Equatoguinean literature is a product of three primary influences: African, European, and American (3). Indeed, the major accomplishment of this book is its ability to draw convincing connections between its primary authors and broader global literary and political forces. These connections are miscellaneous, and they clearly display that contemporary Equatoguinean authors are engaged in dialogue with one another and with global influences. In this, the book clearly succeeds in its goal of presenting Equatoguinean literature in its national and transnational contexts.

Each chapter summarizes the texts under consideration, and, while the critical analyses of the texts considered are not incredibly profound or comprehensive, they cogently serve to mark points of interest for future potential study. Lewis effectively makes a case for the critical value of Equatoguinean literature as an important contribution to the Spanish literary canon, and his arguments construct a strong foundation on which scholars interested in Equatorial Guinea can justify research efforts and build further work.

This effort to legitimize and value Equatoguinean works, rather than critically evaluate them, is apparent in the section on César Mba Abogo's work *El porteador de Marlow: canción negra sin color* (2007). Lewis introduces Mba Abogo as a "different, ... sophisticated, transnational, universal writer" and rather than argue each of these points, Lewis points to theories that have proven effective in other

critical analyses of Mba Abogo's work: "Rosi Braidotti, Stuart Hall, Michelle Wright, Manuel José Vega, Homi Bhabha, Slavoj Žižek, Walter Benjamin, Alejo Carpentier, and José Santiago Fernández" (24). Later on in the section, he notes the connections between Mba Abogo's writing and the Cuban poet Marcelino Arozarena, the Nigerian Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nelson Mandela, Joseph Conrad (from which the title of Mba Abogo's work is drawn), and a litany of other significant figures: "W.E.B. Du Bois, Cornel West, Toni Morrison, Edouard Glissant, and Derek Walcott" (43). Rather than providing detailed critical analysis, Lewis's focus is clearly on establishing context and situating the texts under consideration within the global literary dialogue.

Throughout the book, Lewis hints at possible further fields of fruitful analysis. For Siale Djangany's work, *Autorretrato con un infiel* (2007), and Nkogo Esono's *Ecos de Malabo* (2009), he suggests that a consideration of Unamuno's "intrahistoria" would be a productive theoretical lens (53). In Siale Djangany's *En el lapso de una ternura* (2011) and Justo Bolekia Boleká's poetry collection *Los callados anhelos de una vida* (2012), Lewis highlights the symbolic importance of water, but leaves a complete analysis untested, and in Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga, sangre en la selva* (2013), Lewis compares the plot line to that of *Moby Dick* and even *Jaws*. Other connections are offered between Equatoguinean poetry and works by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Miguel Hernández, and José de Espronceda, and Lewis highlights Francisco Zamora Lobo's connection in *Conspiración en el green* (2009) between Equatoguinean politics and the theater of the absurd of Antonin Artaud and Eugène Ionesco. From these connections, it is made abundantly clear that Equatoguinean literature has much to offer the literary scholar.

Lewis' book will be most useful for students and scholars looking for a comprehensive introduction to recent Equatoguinean literary production. This text will hopefully serve as a stepping-stone to further reading and research. It has great bibliographic value for instructors looking to create syllabi that include or focus on contemporary Equatoguinean literature, and it is a compelling advocate for a group of authors and a country that is often overlooked in the Spanish classroom and canon.

Whereas Lewis's *Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea* in 2007 heralded the growth of a promising field; *Equatorial Guinean Literature in its National and Transnational Contexts* celebrates the vibrancy, maturity, and relevancy of Equatoguinean literature. Lewis convincingly argues that the future of Equatoguinean literature is no longer in question; it is awaiting the recognition and study that it deserves, and Equatoguinean literature has earned a place "in the global conscience" (225).