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Contenido

Artículos

- Christopher Dennis, "El 'negro' en dos textos coloniales colombianos y el 'blanqueo' de su alma" 3
Luis A. Intersimone, "Las dos Evas, los dos Borges, los dos Perón" 18
Juan Carlos Toledano Redondo, "The Many Names of God: Christianity in Hispanic Caribbean Science Fiction" 33
Juan E. De Castro, "Rubén Darío Visits Ricardo Palma: Tradition, Cosmopolitanism, and the Development of an Independent Latin American Literature" 48
Juan J. Rojo, "Politics of Absence in Armando Ramírez's *Chin Chin el teporocho*" 62
Parizad Dejbord-Sawan, "Prácticas visuales revisionistas en 'Claroscuro', 'La lección de guitarra' y 'El origen del mundo' de Cristina Peri Rossi" 80
Juan Pablo Rivera, "Heterofilia: el modelo heterosexual en la crítica del Inca Garcilaso" 96
Adam Lifshay, "And So the Worm Turns: The Impossibility of Imperial Imitation in *Una lanza por el Babi* by Daniel Jones Mathama" 108
Alfredo Cesar B. de Melo, "A face de Janus do ensaísmo latino-americano: uma articulação entre as obras de Gilberto Freyre e de Fernando Ortiz" 121

Reviews

- Review Essays 133
Reviews 142
Film Reviews

the island setting of *Una lanza por el Boabi* even if they did not recognize it as such. For example, "Danza negra," a famous poem by Luis Pales Matos of Puerto Rico, is a key antecedent of the Afro-Cuban poetry of writers like Nicolás Guillén and begins as follows:

Calabo y bambú.
 Bambú y calabó.
 El Gran Cocoroco dice: tu-cu-tú.
 La Gran Cocoroca dice: to-co-tó.
 Es el sol de hierro que arde en Tombuctú.
 Es la danza negra de Fernando Poo.
 El cerdo en el fango gruñe: pruu-pruu-prú.
 El sapo en la charca sueña: cro-cro-cro.
 Calabó y bambú.
 Bambú y calabó. (51)

The eponymous sixth line implicitly links the rhythms of Afro-Caribbean culture to those of Fernando Poo, which is none other than present-day Bioko. The island was named after the Portuguese mariner who in the early 1470s became the first European to visit it. He initiated the dynamics of Iberian colonization on the island that Jones Mathama would eventually be the first indigenous writer to explore at length.¹

The island of Fernando Poo also makes a brief appearance in a canonical text even closer in time to Jones Mathama, the testimonial *Biografía de un cimarrón* of 1968 by Miguel Barne: based on his interviews with the Cuban ex-slave Esteban Montejo. Here, Fernando Poo emerges as a sort of penal colony to which recalcitrant slaves are banished by Camilo Polavieja, a Spanish governor in Cuba in the 1890s: "Una vez le dio por mandar negros a la isla de Fernando Poo. Aquello era un castigo fuerte, porque esa isla era desierta. Era una isla de cocodrilos y tiburones. Ahí soltaban a los negros y no se podían ir. A Fernando Poo mandaban a ladrones, chulos, cuatros y rebeldes" (85). This image of the island is not altogether accurate, as it was by no means "desierta": Fernando Poo long had been home to the Bubi people of whom Jones Mathama writes. That is, the emptying of an island indigenous presence in Barne is not remotely present in *Una lanza por el Boabi*. As a trope, however, the Fernando Poo in *Biografía de un cimarrón* is a richly imbricated one. On one hand the island is barbarism incarnate, with savage animals ready to assault slaves deemed equally unfit for human society. On the other hand, those slaves have achieved a certain liberty of action and speech—even a certain return to an ancestral continent—unthinkable in Cuba. They bear on their bodies the mark of subversion of empire as well, for Barne notes that all Cuban slaves sent to the island were marked with a tattoo that was "señal de rebeldía contra el gobierno español" (85). Although Barne wrote after Jones Mathama and therefore could not serve as a possible influence, nowhere in *Una lanza por el Boabi* does Jones Mathama acknowledge the history of the slaves condemned to freedom on Fernando Poo nor, indeed, to any historical episodes prior to the temporal framework of his plot in the first quarter of the 20th century.²

¹Evita's *Cuando los Combes luchaban* is set on the Guinean mainland.

²Gue's birthdate is given as May 17, 1913 (14). In the final chapter, he leaves the island for Lagos in 1923 and heads from there to Europe in 1925. The short concluding section of the text notes that he returns upon the death of his father after "muchos años transcurrieron" (308).

AND SO THE WORM TURNS: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF IMPERIAL IMITATION IN *UNA LANZA POR EL BOABÍ* BY DANIEL JONES MATHAMA

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The first African novel in Spanish was, arguably, nothing of the sort. *Una lanza por el Boabi*, written by Daniel Jones Mathama and published in Barcelona in 1962, claims on its title page to be the product of the "Primer autor de la Guinea Española." The first novelist, however, from Spanish Guinea—a land known today as Equatorial Guinea, the only hispanophone country in Africa—was Leoncio Evita, whose 1953 *Cuando los Combes luchaban* disappeared so quickly and thoroughly from the horizon that Jones Mathama was evidently unaware of it nine years later. As for the African locus indicated in the title page, while it is true that Jones Mathama himself was a colonial subject and that the plot develops in "Guinea Española," various other elements outline *Una lanza por el Boabi* from elsewhere: the publication in Catalonia, for instance, and the narrator's explicit positioning of himself "aquí en España" throughout his many metatextual musings (51). Furthermore, even the question of whether the text is a novel in the first place is disputable. No other genre exists to describe the text's three hundred pages, but *Una lanza por el Boabi* reads more like a failed attempt at imitating a foreign form than anything else: a Bildungsroman whose structure repeatedly breaks down as the narrative digresses time and again away from the presumed protagonist. The reality, however, that Jones Mathama's text is not the first of Spanish Guinea, nor conceived from there, nor perhaps even a novel, makes it compelling precisely because of its non-conformities. This text, widely but inaccurately dismissed as collaborationist, reveals through its equivocations and ambiguities the hesitations of an indigenous and colonial author who believes he is launching a national literary tradition in synchrony with empire. Jones Mathama's failures at metropolitan mimicry, both of ideology and form, are the true success of his novel and the reason why it should be read.

Equatorial Guinea today, a composite of the island Bioko and the mainland region Río Muni, is on the verge of metamorphosing from one of the African nations least known in the West to one of the more familiar. This is due to the fairly recent discoveries of large off-shore oil reserves. The promise of petrodollars is presumed to be a primary inspiration for a March 2004 coup attempt in which Mark Thatcher, son of the former British prime minister, was implicated, and a root cause of an Equatoguinean money-laundering scandal that broke the same year in Washington, D.C., that forced the complicit and hitherto eminent Riggs Bank to close and be sold off. Readers of canonical Latin American literature, however, long ago came upon references to

Jones Mathama also makes no reference either to Pales Matos of "Danza negra" or to Leoncio Evita, his Guinean predecessor. Quite the contrary, he struggles constantly to affirm his right to an authorial existence in the writerly vacuum in which he appears to think himself situated. The successive opening frames of his text—the inaccurate title page, a prefatory remark, an introduction, an epigraph, and the first chapter—seem in the aggregate to constitute a desperate attempt to establish his legitimacy to speak from a space so undefined as to allow him no grounds from which to speak. Thus the second of those opening frames, the prefatory mark, reveals Jones Mathama's acute consciousness of transgressing a boundary simply by daring to publish:

Acaso sea innecesario, pero me veo obligado a dar una corta explicación antes de iniciar mi breve e histórico relato. En la actualidad, la mayoría de los autores ponen sus fotos en el anverso o en el dorso de sus libros, y como quiera que esta costumbre se va generalizando, no quisiera apartarme de la corriente; pero tampoco quiero que la gente me juzgue de antemano siguiendo la célebre frase 'La cara es el espejo del alma'. Porque sé positivamente que si me tuviesen que juzgar de acuerdo con la mencionada frase sería condenado sin discusión alguna. (5)

That a portrait photo on a book cover would render an author "condenado, sin discusión alguna" is hardly common. That such an author would produce a thoroughly collaborationist text in the subsequent pages—this is the consensus verdict of existing scholarship on *Una lanza por el Boabí*—seems even less likely. Jones Mathama shows himself here to be well-aware of the tensions involved in putting a photo of a Guinean on his text: the Spanish readers literally will judge the book by its cover and not even consider it. A physically black face, he implies, will be taken immediately as a reflection of a metaphorically black soul. Consequently, he cannot join the "costumbre" and "corriente" of metropolitan authors, no matter how much he desires to do so.³ This phenomenon of the colonial subject willing but consciously unable to imitate a hegemonic model is thus a tension present even before the book proper begins. The metatextuality of the prefatory remark as well as the erroneous title page is not that of an author confident in his project but one beset by doubts about the very viability of his voice. His text is entering a market hitherto closed to his kind.⁴

The next frame of the book, the introduction, deepens further the sense of authorial anxiety by suggesting that the right to discourse of this (presumably) inaugural Guinean writer is so

³The concerns voiced in the prefatory remark are belied nonetheless by the cover that appeared on one (possibly the only) edition of the book, which in fact does feature a passport-style snapshot of the author in a suit and tie. The author's eyes focus to the right of the reader, as if looking ahead. The photo is inset amid a much larger sketch of a black man wearing only a loincloth and holding a red spear against a green, presumably sylvan backdrop. His profile is the exact opposite of that of the photographed author in that the sketched figure is seen only from behind and facing to the left of the reader, as if into the past. The professional Western dress and gaze of the author, therefore, explicitly contradicts the semiotic stylings of the sketched figure.

⁴The original copy of *Una lanza por el Boabí* used for this paper includes signs of an attempted market entry of another sort: a red strip of paper circles the book proper and announces "OBRA SELECCIONADA EN EL PREMIO NADAL 1960 por el primer autor de la Guinea Española." This declaration is puzzling on several counts. First, of course, Jones Mathama is not "el primer autor de la Guinea Española," although that error is understandable given the fleeting presence of Evita's preceding work. Second, *Una lanza por el Boabí* was published in 1962, not 1960. Third, it never won the Premio Nadal, a prestigious annual Spanish literary prize.

questionable as to raise the issue of whether such a person could even be considered sane. "Primero he de aclarar," announces Jones Mathama. "que segun diciamen facultativo, soy un ser bastante normal, y mis amigos y conocidos lo corroboran [sic]" (7). This unusual need to affirm the legitimate reality of his own existence—and therefore of his right to articulate that existence via the production of a text that inscribes it—should be located in its unsaid roots: his understanding that he is the first author from Guinea to break into the world of Spanish letters. Hegemonic discourses, by definition, set the rules of normalcy; excluded voices that seek inclusion, therefore, have to first and foremost prove that they belong within the definition of the normal. Yet this is a paradoxical endeavor inevitably doomed to failure because exclusion *a priori* implies anormalcy and accusations of any of its devastating sociopolitical variants: barbarism, madness, oneiric delusion, etc. Subsequent musings by Jones Mathama on how "[le] asaltan extrañas ideas" reveal the nature of the task before him, such as when he confesses that "A veces me veo convertido en Tarzán de pie sobre un elefante blanco y dando órdenes a una manada de proboscídeos y paquidermos" (7). The dream of becoming Tarzan is that of inverting his relationship to the very darknesses he knows his readers dread, those that lie beyond and therefore oppose and define their own systems of knowledge. In a virtual space here, this African author suddenly has a portrait photo after all: he is a white man taming the jungle, articulating it for the metropolitan reader back home, which is to say that he deserves to be included in the discursive systems that exclude him. There is a deep pathos in this yearning to become Tarzan, a dream destined of course to fail.

The unreality of the Tarzan conversion is manifested further by the rapidity with which it succumbs to other equally unstable imaginings. As Jones Mathama writes in the very next sentence, "En ocasiones, también me veo montado a caballo al frente de numerosos soldados. guerreando y conquistando ciudades y naciones contra un enemigo desconocido. En otras me veo cargado de cadenas, sudando y sangrando bajo el látigo de un impacable carcelero" (7). Conquistador one moment and slave the next, he then promptly refashions himself as "sentado sobre un trono, con el ceño en la mano, dictando leyes y dando órdenes a unos ministros que se mantienen en pie con las cabezas inclinadas en señal de respeto y sumisión" (7-8). Yet what kind of an introduction is this? The purpose of any prologue is to guide the reader on how to interpret the text to follow, an exercise at once pedagogical and affirmative. In the nested opening frames of *Una lanza por el Boabí*, however, the author ricochets from inaugural author (allegedly) to condemned non-entity (the absent photo) to conqueror to slave to king, none of which has anything to do with the text at hand and everything to do with his own metatextual position as author. This position is so precarious as to collapse into an alienation of not only subaltern from hegemon but self from self. Although Jones Mathama seeks to explain away his diverse imaginings with "¿Acaso no podría ser un sueño lo que la gente llama realidad" and attributes this rhetorical conjecture in a Christian episteme—the true reality, he says, is not the material world but the spiritual sphere of Christ—the argument is not convincing. For an indigenous author seeking inclusion in a foreign discursive system, the actual difference between "lo que la gente llama realidad" and the worlds of dreams and insanity is all that which separates metropole from periphery.

All scholars to date have dismissed *Una lanza por el Boabí* as a straightforward defense of the Spanish colonizing project. Mbaré N'gom, a leading commentator on Equatoguinean literature, has argued repeatedly that "En definitiva, la novela de Daniel Jones Mathama justifica la situación colonial...lo cual la sitúa...dentro de la literatura de consentimiento" ("La literatura

africana, 413).⁵ He adds that "*Una lanza por el Boabi* offers the author's praise-filled vision of the colonial situation, whose benefits he describes in Spanish Guinea. Nor does he miss any opportunity to cast a critical eye upon the indigenous populations and to denounce them as 'savages'" ("African Literature," 589). Jorge A. Salvo, one of the few researchers to attempt an analytic overview of early Equatoguinean prose, even has implied that *Una lanza por el Boabi* is not worth studying due to its pro-colonial sentiment. Although only five Equatoguinean novels existed prior to 1990, the upper time limit of his study, Salvo argues that excluding one of them from analysis is justifiable on ideological grounds: "Por pertencer a la llamada literatura de consentimiento, que hace la apología del colonialismo, se descartó la novela de Jones Mathama" (2). This position is striking given the paucity of Equatoguinean novels in the first place and the fact that Salvo's own investigation is entitled *La formación de la identidad en la novela hispano africana*. Up until now, not a single article-length study seems to exist that has focused on *Una lanza por el Boabi*, nor has any of the scattered scholarly references to the text questioned the nature of its putative collaborationist ideology.

The source of such accusations is rooted without doubt in the many times that Jones Mathama indeed does laud the Spanish colonial presence. The titular Boabi is the maximum leader of an indigenous society on Fernando Poo, a wise and mature man who evidently deserves his position and who is great friends with the Spanish imperial authorities. "Siempre luchó en pro de la justicia," explains the narrator. "Tanto es así, que el mismo gobierno de S.M. Alfonso XIII, y más tarde el de la República, supieron distinguirlo merecidamente" (92). The Boabi's son, Gue, is born in the opening pages of the text and subsequently proceeds through a series of coming-of-age experiences that allow the narrator to explore various local landscapes and customs. In the final pages, Gue heads to Europe to be educated and returns to the island only upon the death of his father. In other words, *Una lanza por el Boabi* sets itself up for the charge of colonialism by tracing the trajectory of a family of indigenous leaders who prove able to assimilate to Western orders. This is where existing criticism of the text stops. Yet with so little attention paid to African literature in Spanish and with so few examples of the phenomenon even in existence, it would be a disservice to exclude the book from discussion even if it presented a case of clear-cut collaborationism. After all, as Benita Sampedro Vizcaya rightly notes, "The inclusion of Africa in intellectual discussions of Spanish imperial and colonial history and criticism remains a largely unexplored path. It is a path that must be pursued" (202-3). And N'gom himself points out that "African literature in Spanish is a cultural project that has received very little critical and theoretical attention... African literature in Spanish may be considered the most conspicuous absentee in the literary debate on Hispanic and/or African literatures" ("African Literature," 584). Surely even an allegedly pro-colonial text is worth examining at length given the dearth of relevant primary and secondary literature, particularly a text that claims to be launching a unique cultural tradition in the hispanophone world. After all, praise of power is rarely absent of implied tensions; a panegyric from the periphery is usually not quite what it seems.

A periphery, clearly, is Jones Mathama's subject in *Una lanza por el Boabi*. He indicates as much in the final opening lines that guide his readers forward, the epigraph and initial lines of the first chapter. Regarding the former, the epigraphs that precede each chapter are curious constructions for various reasons. First, although they are usually portentous and vaguely moral-

istic, they often seem to bear no direct relationship at all to the chapter at hand. Second, they are always signed by "El autor." This belies the basic purpose of an epigraph, which is to inform the text to follow with the authoritative declaration of a third party. Therefore, Jones Mathama stands here at a distance from his own literary production. He cites only himself in the epigraphs as the authorizing inscriber, thereby suggesting again via metatextual commentary that he is an isolated figure whose book is precariously situated outside the realm of others' discourses. Moreover, the unclear relationship of the epigraphs to the chapters that follow them unsettles even further the organizing principles of the text at hand. The first chapter, for example, begins with the following epigraph: "Al asomarme al exterior quedé asombrado ante tanta belleza, pero más adelante aquel asombro se tradujo en horror ante la monstruosidad de hombres y bestias. El autor" (11). The chapter proper, however, commences with "En un apartado rincón del mundo, sembrado por la Naturaleza y cultivado por manos invisibles, crecen las más variadas especies de vegetales. Tal es la abundancia y espesura que no hay pluma capaz de describirla" (11). Tenuous links exist, perhaps, between the "exterior" of the epigraph and the "Naturaleza" of the opening sentence, but the hyperbolic, almost Gothic quality of the former bears no resemblance to the even descriptive tone of the latter. A segue does seem to appear, however, in the shared metatextual expression of an inability to articulate. Whether the narrator gapes in surprise and horror or notes the impossibility of describing the scene before him, a commonly frustrated attempt at expression befalls him. That is to say that Jones Mathama begins this (presumed) inaugural representation of Spanish Guinea with a doubled acknowledgement of his own inability to speak.

All the peripheries that surround *Una lanza por el Boabi* as a literary project—all the scriptural borderlands that are the title page, the prefatory note, the introduction, the epigraph and the first words of the first chapter—are paralleled by those of Spanish Guinea itself, an "apartado rincón del mundo" and a colonial project of equally tenuous frames and frontiers (11). Later on the first page of the first chapter, the narrator refers to Africa as "aquel continente" and thereby seats himself in the metropole, far away from the uncertain land he will seek to represent. He repeats both his vantage point and his inability to articulate shortly thereafter: "Lamento de veras no poder describir adecuadamente la incommensurable grandiosidad y exotismo de lo que he visto en aquellas tierras" (11). The fundamental failure at mimicry that will mark *Una lanza por el Boabi* is already evident, for the narrator admits here that his testimonial experiences in "aquellas tierras" of "exotismo" cannot be communicated. He wants to describe the colony but cannot, for it exists beyond the realm of metropolitan discourse. He situates himself in Spain and writes in the Spanish tongue, all with the aim of serving as a willing author of empire, yet this project is condemned at the start by the unrepresentability of a land so distant in kind as well as geography as to be inexpressible within the imperial episteme he has chosen.

This is the paradox of *Una lanza por el Boabi* and the larger implication at hand: the attempt to confine a colony within the discourse of the colonizer is doomed even when a colonial subject himself seeks to achieve as much. The *différance* of a colony—its discursive existence is ever deferred into difference when an imperial pen seeks to define it—frustrates even the most avid attempt to yoke it within hegemonic frames. All remaining attempts by Jones Mathama in his opening chapter to force the alterity of Spanish Guinea into models familiar to Europeans end up creating a very different textual reality than the collaborationist impulse noted by scholars, namely, the unique legitimacy of Guinean culture on its own terms. That is, a surprisingly robust defense of Guinean customs and landscapes appears and even overwhelms the apparent intent of the author to craft a pro-Western story. Rather than the assimilation of the African into the European that the narrator proposes frequently and that supports the charge of colonial consent,

⁵Since the 1993 publication of the cited verdict, N'gom has published very similar versions of it in 1995 ("Algunos aspectos" 93), 2000 (Introducción 20), 2001 ("The Missing Link," approx. 6) and 2003 ("African Literature" 589).

the reverse often takes place in the text itself. Subject becomes object and vice versa, as the very inability to express subaltern realities in hegemonic discourses forces the narrator to draw European customs and Europeans into Guinean cultural spheres rather than the inverse. This is a crucial point overlooked by those scholars who portray the text as an unproblematic acceptance of empire.

For instance, a *costumbrista* description of Guinean food elsewhere in the first chapter begins with the narrator noting that "Existen dos clases de desayunos: el fernandino y el bubí. El primero se parece bastante al de estilo europeo" (19). This particular attempt at narrowing the cultural space between colonized and colonizer is soon followed by a description of local seafood as "de exquisito sabor. . . Constituyen también un plato estupendo" (19). The movement here is subtle but significant, for gastronomic assimilation moves toward vindication of local cuisine. This process strengthens on the next page when the narrator, commenting on how Guineans allow dried meat to become infested with worms, stresses a cultural equality with the West: "Esto de los gusanos me hace recordar el queso Roquefort, en el cual se ve a éstos moverse y saltar y, sin embargo, causa la delicia de muchos europeos" (20). The perspective of the narrator is manifestly Eurocentric and yet constantly undercut, for the ideological trajectory of the passage is not that of an Africa that should become like Europe but a Europe that turns out to be a version of Africa. The Roquefort cheese appears as a European referent framed by African gastronomy and not vice versa. The narrator thus concludes this overview of Guinean foods by noting that "Muchos son los europeos que se acostumbran a estas comidas y les gustan" (21). This statement reverses the opening gambit of this *costumbrista* sketch of how a local breakfast "se parece bastante al de estilo europeo," for it is the Europeans who end up adapting to African culture and not vice versa (19). The original impulse to assimilate the colonized to the colonizer is successively turned on its head by the praise of Guinean seafood, the framing of the wormy Roquefort, and finally the conclusion of how Europeans become successfully Africanized.

This sort of auto-deconstructive process pervades *Una lanza por el Boabí*. It runs against the pro-colonial currents. When the titular Boabí is introduced to the reader prior to the above gastronomic passage, he is described as the "reyezuelo o gran jefe" of the island who reports a local conflict "a su gran amigo el gobernador general de los territorios de la Guinea Española" (16). The Governor-General promptly issues a solution to the conflict. Thus the stance of the Guinean author and leader seem clear: the Boabí is an underling of the colonial superstructure who happily allows the Spanish to perform their rightful role as law and order givers. A more pro-colonial frame for the Boabí in his first appearance in the text could not be imagined. Nonetheless, such a reading misses virtually everything key about this passage. First, the conflict at hand is actually caused by Spanish and other foreign sailors who exploit local workers: "Tanto fue el abuso y los actos de violencia, que los nativos elevaron sus quejas al hombre más influyente en toda la isla, o sea el gran boabí" (16). Second, the Governor-General's solution of jailing and then repatriating the Spanish miscreants turns out to be a failure, as "desgraciadamente, la semilla del mal ya se había sembrado entre los propios nativos" (16). In short, Guineans here are corrupted by Spaniards rather than being deemed, say, inherently barbaric.

Third, the narrator concludes this initial representation of colonized/colonizer dynamics in *Una lanza por el Boabí* by noting that "La selva es el albergue de las fieras y a nadie le extraña encontrar en ella leones, gorilas, elefantes y toda clase de animales dañinos, pero tampoco nadie debe dudar que en las ciudades existe cierta clase de animales bipedotes mucho más perjudicial que sus selváticos hermanos" (16). The urban bipeds in question are clearly Europeans, a population "mucho más perjudicial" than the savage beasts whose home is the jungle. The heart of darkness

is in Europe, not Africa. As in the gastronomic passage, the apparent assimilation of the subaltern upends into a hierarchy in which the hegemon huddles at the bottom. The Boabí is not a bootlicker nor the Spanish Governor-General a Solomon, for the conquerors caused the conflict at hand, not the conquered; and that is why the local ruler charges the conquistador's representative with resolving it. This he could not even do. His powers are too limited to deal with the insidious influence of the "animales bipedotes" who are his compatriots. Those who call their home the African forest may be dehumanized, but not nearly so much as those of the concrete jungle back in Europe. Guineans here are neither aspiring Europeans nor, for that matter, any other trope familiar in colonial discourses about indigenous peoples (noble savages, wholesale barbarians, innocent Edenic dwellers, etc.), but rather individuals with a unique and legitimate existence of their own.

Such rhetorical gestures that undermine seemingly obvious ideological hierarchies tend to pass unperceived amid explicitly pro-European prose. For instance, according to Ngom, "En definitiva, la novela de Daniel Jones Mathama justifica la situación colonial, ya que considera 'un deber ineludible proclamar por todo lo alto la gran labor que España está realizando en aquella isla. . .'" ("La literatura africana," 413). This rousing pro-colonial quotation from *Una lanza por el Boabí* is evidently meant to be climactic, as it appears on the penultimate page and is followed by the even more bullish proclamation by the narrator that Spanish institutions are "dotando a la isla de un fin de beneficios y mejoramientos sobre todo en lo que se refiere a la enseñanza y religión" (309). Yet even this unqualified encomium is not the servile acceptance of inherent European superiority that it seems. Rather than framing Spanish imperialism as the triumph of civilization over barbarism—a tropological dialectic altogether too familiar to readers of Latin American literature—Jones Mathama casts it as concretizing universal human fraternity and equality. The legator of such planetary brotherhood is the Christian god, yet the spirit is in some implicit sense actually that of the French revolution. Unlike parallel traditions in Latin American literature, in *Una lanza por el Boabí* the indigenous people of Fernando Poo deserve neither extermination nor absolute assimilation; the former is never on the table and the latter is belied by the extensive and positively engaged *costumbrismo* of the text. Rather, the locals are to benefit by Spanish colonialism simply because it will help consolidate their innate equality before heaven and earth. The argument is pro-imperial but the egalitarian premise is hardly conservative. Jones Mathama is no proponent of a return to Guinean autonomy either politically or culturally—he accepts fully both Spain and Christianity as twin evangelical projects—but he sees both, however naively, as forces for fulfilling a common brotherhood.

Thus even in his culminating praises of imperialism, Jones Mathama emphasizes that the glories of Spanish rule on Fernando Poo reside in their recognition of racial and ethnic equality: "Por doquier se veía el progreso, el bien estar, las escuelas, el magnífico hospital y la asistencia en todos los centros docentes sin discriminación de ninguna clase" (309). Similarly in Spain, he insists, "Aquí en esta bendita tierra, no existe diferencia en el color de la piel. Os hablo con la verdad que brota desde el fondo de mi corazón" (310). And when summarizing Gue's educational experience in Iberia, Jones Mathama declares that "todos sus compañeros sólo vieron en él a un nuevo condiscípulo sin importarle el color de la piel. En esto reside la razón del triunfo y la verdadera vida social que siempre ha reinado en España" (308-9). This description of Spanish history is absurdly inaccurate but not slavishly colonial. In *Una lanza por el Boabí*, Bubi culture in general is subject to hispanizing forces and this is tantamount to a certain assimilationist stance, but the process is in the service of the larger humanistic dream of universal equality. That

this dream is inspired by Christine religious doctrine does not condemn it necessarily to fundamental conservatism any more than that of liberation theologians.

The epigraph of the final section of the book (entitled as "CONCLUSION" rather than "CAPÍTULO") reads as revelation but parses as revolution: "La verdad es unicolor y solo [sic] tiene un nombre, PUREZA, al contrario de la mentira cuyo único calificativo es, IMPUREZA, y para engañar a ingenuos se disfraza con colores llamativos" (308). No human by virtue of his color has claim to the truth, says Jones Mathama, and those tricked by the connotations of language (blackness associated with impurity, whiteness with purity) are but fools and simpletons. Linguistically, Jones Mathama contests here the signified of a colonial signifier, undermines the imperial system of signs so that metropolitan subjectivities are shown to be no more inherently human than their colonial subjects: the value of both before the order of heaven are recorded as of equal weight. The same holds true before the order of earth, to wit the final scene in the previous chapter in which Gue is on the deck of the ship bound for Europe and a foreign girl asks him to light her cigarette. He is "extasiado" by the moment "porque jamás estuvo en semejante situación con una muchacha que no fuera de su raza" (306). Jones Mathama proceeds to lavish the girl with praise: she is "aquella beldad" and "la hermosa muchacha" with "sonrientes labios" and "una risa cristalina," while Gue is so awestruck that the match burns down to his fingers (306). Once again, an unproblematic pro-colonial hierarchy seems apparent; and once again, this reading proves wrong. The scene (and this final chapter) ends with the girl turning to Gue and requesting the following:

—Dame tu brazo para bajar al comedor.

Al entrar en el amplio salón, uno de los comensales dijo medio en broma medio en serio:

—¡Miren, ahí llegan Africa y Occidente!

Sonrientes, y por primera vez, los dos se juntaron para cenar. (307)

If the subsequent epigraph proclaims that moral truth knows no color, here neither does society. A black boy and a white girl, "Africa y Occidente," join and eat as equals. True, the ship is bound for Europe all the same, but it is not leaving Africa altogether behind. Gue deserves a seat of that table, alongside a European woman no less. The radicalness of proposing such a union as early as 1962, the year of publication, cannot be overstated. *Una lanza por el Boabi*, of course, is not a call to arms amid an era of militant decolonization movements in Africa, but neither is it a sycophantic and wholesale submission to European dominance.

These tensions that worm through the text and upturn it—these constant conversions of colonial kowtowing into something rather more upright—manifest themselves within the book's structure as well as its content. The first chapter appears to imitate a classic bildungsroman with the birth of Gue, the heir to the Boabi, his mother dies in the third chapter when he is five years old, thereby isolating the paternal line as a narrative axis. Myth criticism might provide ample analytical frameworks for what happens next as the young hero passes through a series of adventures en route to assuming his rightful succession to his father. The problem, however, is that the bildungsroman just never quite comes together. First, Gue is repeatedly described as devilish and savage, as a sort of anti-hero more than anything else. For instance, within the span of a few representative paragraphs he is depicted as "aquel pequeño salvaje" and "aquel diablo de mucha-cho" (68). Second, the title character is the father, not the son, creating the contradiction of a bildungsroman whose protagonist is somehow divorced from his own story. Indeed, in considering the biographical element at play in the text, Ngom inadvertently reveals this instability: "Relato autobiográfico, la obra de Jones Mathama también defiende la ideología colonial y, como

tal, cae dentro de la literatura de consenso. Esa es la razón por la cual la figura de Maximiliano C. Jones, el Boabi, personaje prominente de la colonia y padre de Gue el protagonista ocupa el primer plano en casi todo el texto." ("Algunos aspectos," 93). That is, Gue is "el protagonista" even though his father paradoxically "ocupa el primer plano." Ngom points out that the historical Jones was "the owner of several plantations and a member of the local black aristocracy, as well as a collaborator with Spanish authorities," but this fact itself does not clarify whether the fictional Boabi should be considered more than Gue the principal subject of the narrator. ("African Literature," 589).⁶ The reality is that the Boabi makes only scattered appearances in the long text that bears his name, even if references made to him in absentia by other characters are included, while Gue is the focus of the opening birth scene and many other chapters that follow. The confusion over identifying the main character suggests that *Una lanza por el Boabi* is a bildungsroman more in intent than achievement.

Even the generally dominant focus on Gue does not lend a fundamental consistency to the text, as if Jones Mathama could not bring himself to fulfill a unifying structure anymore than an ideologically consistent content. For starters, Gue and his adventures often disappear before a wealth of *costumbrismo* that needs no human character, much less a colonial David Copperfield, to exist. And more important still is the fact that Gue's adventures abruptly break off in the middle of the eighth chapter when an entirely unrelated other story begins and continues on for over 80 pages, or more than a full quarter of *Una lanza por el Boabi*. This novella of sorts, detailing how a hypnotist temporarily turns village women into sex slaves, contains a set of characters who appear nowhere else in the text. Its brief references to the Boabi apart, the novella bears no apparent relationship to the rest of the plot. The bildungsroman featuring Gue, such as it is, simply vanishes in media res and reappears equally unexpectedly. Moreover, the conclusion that would seem to compel it forward, i.e., the climactic move to Europe and the resulting imperial education—only thereafter, it seems, will Gue be able to take his rightful place as his father's successor—is postponed throughout the book. Three times in the text he is positioned to leave for Europe; three times this does not happen. His destiny remains constantly deferred. But why can Jones Mathama not seem to bring himself to move Gue off the island? The final pages in which this does happen are but cursory. The multiple structures that the text establishes for itself never truly are fulfilled.

The simple answer is that the *raison d'être* of the book is to promote Guinea per se. Yet this works against a collaboratorist reading. Scholarship that focuses only on the pro-colonial statements that indeed are pervasive in the text ignores that *Una lanza por el Boabi* is a text manifestly uncomfortable with itself. This is a book published in the imperial homeland, narrated from there as well, written in the imperial language and in a particular form (the bildungsroman) of a genre (the novel) of Western origin, and despite all of these frames and all of the explicit praises of empire they imply, a literary artifact at one with the colonial project never does emerge. The tensions of empire are never relaxed. The author is unsure of his right to speak to begin with, indeed to present himself in any media, and when he finally does so and commences the main of his text, he cannot abide by the very assimilationist ideology he stakes out nor by

⁶Ngom writes in one source that Daniel Jones Mathama is the nephew of Maximiliano C. Jones ("African Literature, 589) but in another that he was his son ("La literatura africana" 413).

the foreign literary structures that he seeks to assume. The plentiful *costumbrista* passages alone lend copious space to the unique existences of Guinean culture and flora and fauna, phenomena that cannot be reduced to imperial mimicry and that, as in the case of the wormy meat and cheese, often reverse in subtle ways the lens through which Africa and Europe frame each other. Jones Mathama fully desires for Guinea the progress that he believes Spain represents, but at no point does he call for Guinean subjectivity itself to vanish. Quite the opposite, when discussing Bubi youths who have been sent to Spain for a proper education, he admonishes them for trying to lose their ancestral culture: "De entre vosotros, incluso hay quien está avergonzado de que sus padres sean bubis y tengan la cara cortada: *I say shame on you a thousand times, and may God pity your damn ignorance*." (Mil vergüenzas caigan sobre ti, y que Dios compadezca tu maldita ignorancia). ¡Al diablo con vuestras estupidas presunciones!" (252)

Una lanza por el Boabi is thus a pro-colonial text that manages to encourage the maintenance of African subjectivities even while praising the adoption of the religious and material progress attributed to the colonizing power. Although Jones Mathama frequently denigrates Gue and some local customs, his belief in the universal equality of all human beings as ordained by Christianity and upheld by Spain—again, the accuracy of his beliefs is beside the point—necessarily forces him to constantly level the hierarchies that he himself has established and that divide metropolitan from colonial subjects. Thus, while talking about "las virtudes y los vicios de la humanidad," the narrator proposes that "en aquella minúscula isla de Fernando-Poo suceden las cosas como en todas partes. Hay gente buena y gente mala que allí se divierte, son felices, sufren y mueren, y la virtud y el vicio impera como en cualquier otro lugar" (229). And in a passage in which the narrator, opining from "aquí en la Península," denounces polygamous customs on Fernando Poo, he again ultimately equalizes the situation in Guinea with that in Europe

esta situación de la poligamia es una de las más graves y peligrosas enfermedades no sólo en Africa, sino en todas partes del mundo. Todos sabemos que en Europa son muchos los que viven en secreto una doble vida...lo que sí puedo afirmar es que las debilidades y las miserias humanas no se localizan sólo en Africa, sino que está extendida en todas partes, y aún me atrevería a decir que el refinamiento y por tanto la corrupción y las costumbres licenciosas, tienen su cuna precisamente en los países más civilizados. (275)

Once again, an unproblematic reading of the text as pro-colonial is impossible. The moral backwardness of Guinea, like the worms in its food, turn out to be similar to those of Europe. Metropolitan culture, indeed, turns out again to suffer perhaps even greater from the ills at hand. Thus, an ideological equalizing of Guinean with Spanish subjects is either achieved or the expected imperial hierarchy actually reversed.

In defending the composition of African literature in indigenous African languages, Nguigi wa Thiong'o, the well-known Kenyan writer and scholar, has suggested that "A writer who tries to communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope in the languages [i.e. African] of

⁷Merely communicating the story via written narrative, instead of oral, represents a break with traditional literary forms in the Guinean context.

⁸The use of English here and occasionally elsewhere in the text is a curious case of code-switching that deserves sustained analysis in a different study of the text. Oddly, words in English, though only sprinkled throughout *Una lanza por el Boabi*, appear far more often than words in Bubi.

the people becomes a subversive character" (433). The anti-imperial impulse of deliberately using a language of local rather than European origin to create African literature is self-evident. But far away on the other end of the spectrum, can an African author who employs a European tongue in order to produce pro-colonial literature somehow also be subversive? The case of Daniel Jones Mathama and his sole novel would seem to suggest yes. Here is an author who consciously launches (or so he believes) a literary tradition in a text that fully welcomes the Spanish presence in Guinea, religiously and politically as well as linguistically. As a culminating gesture, he even sends his apparent protagonist off to Spain to be educated in European ways. Therefore, *Una lanza por el Boabi*, from its language to its content to its form, shows a persistent effort by Jones Mathama that is the opposite of what Nguigi proposes: the willing embrace and imitation of the metropolitan. And yet every step of the way, from his hesitations to his upended hierarchies, Jones Mathama does not satisfy the very structures that he sets up for himself. His ideology of imitation auto-deconstructs and in so doing undercuts all charges of colonial consent. The failures of his text show the impossibility of willful mimicry of the metropolitan even by a colonial author entirely in step with the march of empire. As an artifact of inherent curiosity *Una lanza por el Boabi* should be read—it is, after all, only the second African novel ever to be written in Spanish—but as an artwork that succeeds in its insufficiencies, it should be studied and taught. The implications for indigenous literatures in the rest of the Spanish-speaking world could be many.

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A FACE DE JANUS NO ENSAÍSMO LATI- NO-AMERICANO

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Para Mónica González

Chama a atenção o fato de quase não haver estudos comparativos entre Gilberto Freyre (1900-57) e Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969).¹ Afinal de contas, as semelhanças entre os dois ensaístas latino-americanos são dignas de nota: ambos estiveram na fronteira entre a literatura e a antropologia, escrevendo as obras seminais do nacionalismo cultural de seus respectivos países (*Casa-grande & senzala* no Brasil e *Contrapunteo cubano* em Cuba), além de terem inserido seus discursos numa moldura por muito tempo considerada anti-racista—que almejava separar os conceitos de raça e cultura—e de terem criado metáforas de incorporação e negociação culturais: *plasticidade* e *transculturização*.

Por que Gilberto Freyre e Fernando Ortiz, com projetos intelectuais tão semelhantes, não têm sido lidos juntos? Embora uma resposta mais completa ainda seja necessária, a leitura da fortuna crítica dos dois autores ajuda a compreender a falta de pontes analíticas entre eles. Enquanto a obra de Ortiz é considerada o cimento de um nacionalismo crítico e cívico (Rojas 1-23), um texto pós-moderno *avant la lettre* (Benítez Rojo 153) ou uma poderosa reflexão contra-fetichista da mercadoria (Coronil "Challenging" 64), a obra de Freyre, apesar da recepção inicial gloriosa, será avaliada como provedora de um reacionário mito da nacionalidade (Needell 72), voz eloquente das oligarquias decadentes do Nordeste brasileiro (Mota 63) e detentora de uma retórica sedutora, porém enganosa (Lima "Da existência" 19). Enquanto o apreço pela obra de Ortiz consegue juntar intelectuais pós-modernos e pós-coloniais, a obra de Freyre, embora central no campo cultural brasileiro, não desfruta da mesma simpatia hegemônica.

Não é de se estranhar, portanto, que Fernando Ortiz, cuja obra ganhou dimensões institucionais na Cuba castrista, não tenha sido lido junto aos textos de Gilberto Freyre, intelectual conservador associado ao luso-tropicalismo e à defesa da colonização portuguesa na África. O objetivo desse artigo não é apenas comparar essas duas obras, localizadas em pontos diferentes do espectro ideológico, mas mostrar como, uma vez pensadas juntas, tais obras podem se iluminar e aumentar o potencial de seus respectivos alcances. Para isso, proponho uma comparação entre os conceitos centrais de seus projetos intelectuais: *plasticidade* na obra de Gilberto Freyre e *transculturização*

¹Este artigo beneficiou-se dos comentários e críticas de Julio Ramos, Jeffrey Needell e mais dois pareceristas anônimos. A eles sou grato.