



Revista Investigações, Recife, v. 39, n. especial – A literatura africana em língua espanhola, e266891, 2026.

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. ISSN 2175-294X.

<https://periodicos.ufpe.br/revistas/INV/index>

<https://doi.org/10.51359/2175-294x.2026.266891>

Black Memory: Catholicism, Colony, and Double Heart in Ndongo- Bidyogo

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Recebido em 16/06/2025.
Aprovado em 20/03/2026.

Como citar:
BOTA, Miquel. Black Memory: Catholicism,
Colony, and Double Heart in Ndongo-Bidyogo.
Revista Investigações, Recife, v. 39, n. especial –
A literatura africana em língua espanhola,
e266891, 2026. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.51359/2175-294x.2026.266891>

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Abstract: This chapter argues that Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's literary use of memory to revisit Spain's colonial past has been largely ignored, especially during the rise of Civil War and dictatorship novels. By centering memory in Equatorial Guinea—a historically marginalized and overlooked space—Ndongo-Bidyogo exposes the affective and territorial gaps that enable colonial amnesia in post-Franco Spain. Addressing this forgotten history is essential to confronting contemporary racism. Drawing on the concept of the “colonial wound,” the chapter emphasizes the need to study Equatoguinean literature intellectually, not through victimization, to challenge dominant narratives and integrate colonialism into Spanish historical memory and cultural discourse.

Keywords: Ndongo-Bidyogo. Colonial wound. Equatorial Guinea. Memory.

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INTRODUCTION: THE SHADOWS OF OBLIVION

In 1987, the same year that Javier Cercas published his first novel, *El móvil*, and that Antonio Muñoz Molina succeeded with *El invierno en Lisboa*, the first novel of Equatorial Guinean writer Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (from now on referred to as *Tinieblas*), came to light. Ndongo-Bidyogo's narrative aims to recover a silenced and marginalized memory that, in 1987, continued to be ignored in the political and literary spheres. Very far from the impact, critics, and media follow-ups that Cercas and Muñoz Molina's works have enjoyed, the story of an Equatorial Guinean boy during Franco's regime barely received any attention upon publication. It was only well into the 21st century that literary criticism and the academic world would consider *Tinieblas* a central novel for understanding contemporary African colonial memory, noting the little attention it has garnered in Spain. The story of a weary and cruel urban couple (*El móvil*), or the unfolding of nighttime romances between jazz clubs of two prototypical lovers (*El invierno en Lisboa*) seem to resonate better with the interests of Spanish readers in the late 1980s amid the European integration process. The success of the aforementioned novels by Cercas and Muñoz Molina can be attributed to a historical escapism that seeks to leave behind the Francoist past for Spain's European future. Nevertheless, the historical trauma of the Spanish Civil War has not been overcome; it remains latent and would explode a decade and a half later in its reclamation of the Second Republic and the conflict as crucial events in contemporary Spanish history. Muñoz Molina himself had published the previous year, in 1986, *Beatus Ille*, which reflects on the Civil War and its effects on the Iberian Peninsula. By the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, these historical facts would be reclaimed by the grandchildren of their protagonists, and would capture media and academic attention, exemplified by the publication, in 2001, of *Soldados de Salamina* by Javier Cercas.

Aleida Assmann defends, in *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, the importance of intergenerational narratives to recover history:

The records of our great-grandparents can only be read against the background of orally transmitted family histories. Schöne sees a parallel between the cultural and the communicative memory, which generally links three generations through memories passed on by word of mouth (2011, p. 4).

The necessity for direct involvement from this generational cohort causes the strategy of forgetting regarding the Civil War and early Francoism to be unsustainable by the late 1990s, leading to a call for a reevaluation of how these events are remembered and recreated as the grandchildren of their protagonists reach adulthood. The pressure from this new cohort contributes to the historical reclamation, voicing the “defeated.” However, concerning Spain’s imperial reality in Equatorial Guinea, the active forgetting continues during the first decade of the 21st century, as there is no social media apparatus promoting and giving voice to those who reclaim it.

In this article, I argue that despite Ndongo-Bidyogo’s insistence on the centrality of memory as an element for revising the past in literary texts, his innovation has not been recognized, even during the boom of Civil War and dictatorship novels in the late 1990s and early 21st century. Ndongo-Bidyogo anchors memory in a marginalized space, in an African land that is no longer Spain and has never been the subject of attention or study before. In this sense, the territorial component contributes to the oblivion. The affective distance between Spain and Equatorial Guinea fosters the amnesia of a very recent colonial past that stains the idea of a democratic and postmodern Spain promoted by intellectuals since the mid-1980s. However, the wounds caused by racism and its current consequences cannot be confronted if Spanish historical memory does not integrate the colonial past, especially the most recent, among its objects of reflection and dissemination. Therefore, reading Ndongo-Bidyogo is essential for understanding a past that remains present, as asserted by writers who create from “the colonial wound,” understood as “el dolor derivado de las experiencias forjadas en situaciones de marginalización, sometimiento, injusticia, inferiorización,

dispensación y muerte” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 176). In this way, this literature fights against the colonial purpose, postponed by coloniality, of bestowing negative identities upon all non-European peoples and crowning the idea of race as the essential marker under which the world population is classified. Furthermore, and as Benita Sampedro argues in “Theorizing Equatorial Guinea,” there is a need to vindicate the study of literary production from Equatorial Guinea but also to do so from a place that does not emphasize a victimization of it but an intellectual analysis to better meditate on the reality of the territory and its peoples: “This theoretical intervention aims at challenging accepted visions of particularity, uniqueness, exceptionalism, and of course victimization, all too often associated with the country at multiple (political, geographical, linguistic, literary) levels.” (2009, p. 18)

It is important to note that, alongside the relevance of the historical context, the place of origin of the narrative voices in the three novels—*El móvil*, *El invierno en Lisboa*, and *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*—establishes their first resonance wave. Wai Chi Dimock states in “A Theory of Resonance” that “texts are emerging phenomena, activated and to some extent constituted by the passage of time, by their continual transit through new semantic networks, modifying their tonality as they proceed” (1997, p. 1061). The place from which Ndongo-Bidyogo writes is that of a colonized subject subjected to strong social pressure under the yoke of Catholic dogma. In the socialist Spain of the postmovida of the late 1980s, this voice lacks media presence and is treated as residual by an intelligentsia that remains far removed from the colonial reality, particularly of Equatorial Guinea.

The Spanish presence in Equatorial Guinea (1778-1968) has been little studied, and the scant interest generated by the former colony is one of the legacies of Francoism that is accentuated by the dominant pro-Europeanism in Spain, which is already part of the European Economic Community in 1987. It is not until the second decade of the 21st century, due on one hand to the anti-racist movements reemerging in the United States and their impact in Europe, and on the other hand, to the efforts of a new generation of Afro-

descendant authors, that *Tinieblas* will generate a second wave of resonance. In this second wave, part of the literary criticism will focus on its importance and will come to regard it as an essential work for understanding the recent colonial past of Spain and its connections to the racism manifesting in waves of immigration that, during Aznar's administration (1996-2004), reached Spain and continues to do so.

A DOUBLE HEART?

The protagonist of *Tinieblas* is a boy (the narrative revisits his childhood, from approximately 6 to 13 years old) of the Fang ethnicity in mid-1950s and early 1960s Equatorial Guinea, shortly before the country's independence. The son of a black landowner, a producer of coffee and cocoa, he experiences a coming-of-age that leads him to embrace his Fang identity and detach from the national-Catholic-Falangist strain imposed on him, with his father's approval. The narrative position of the protagonist is that of a cultural subordinate, regardless of being the son of a landowner. The fact that he belongs to a small local elite does not prevent him from suffering colonization from a position of cultural, social, and racial weakness that will lead him to existential schizophrenia, the resolution of which begins the narrative. Throughout the nine sections of the novel, especially from the second to the eighth, the narrator will pivot between two poles that represent the Fang worldview of existence, championed by his uncle Abeso, the chief of the tribe and spiritual leader of his group, and the Catholic creed, led by fathers Ortiz and Echenagusia, and schoolteacher Don Ramón. The two worlds are perfectly delineated and separated. They are two poles that seek to attract the protagonist in his identity formation process. As Fra-Molinero notes, the two traditions oppose each other in the protagonist's external world:

El niño-adolescente que protagoniza *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* tiene que construir su identidad africana combinando el mundo de las tradiciones por un lado —buenas para su tío Abeso, malas para el Padre Ortiz—y la aceptación del mundo español (escuela, idioma castellano, religión católica, ropa “europea”, comida)—que es justo lo contrario: bueno para el Padre Ortiz, malo para su tío Abeso. En medio está su padre, que a la vez pacta con el régimen colonial y participa de los rituales ancestrales (2000, p. 54).

As he reaches maturity, he will attempt to coexist with both worlds where race is essential for understanding his development and future projection as an adult. Within the Fang context, his racial identity is a reason for integration and joy; in the Catholic-Spanish context, it is the opposite: his race is the main reason for the need for correction and a harsh learning process to achieve it. That disdain towards the Fang, towards Africans in general, is exercised violently by the colonial power over the boy, who struggles to coexist between the two worlds. This is a battle he cannot win since both communities impose expectations of exclusivity upon him. The adult narrator observes this with an ironic gaze that the boy lacked, especially in his reevaluation of the colonizers' actions:

Los españoles habían venido a liberaros de vuestras malas costumbres de andar desnudos enseñando las vergüenzas al aire y de comer carne humana y todo eso, porque es natural que Dios envíe a una raza superior y elegida para que salve a los infieles de la eterna condenación (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 32).

In *Why History Matters*, Gerda Lerner explains: “Differences take on meaning only when they are socially constructed as markers of ranking” (1998, p. 185). Lerner argues that the term race as a social construct exists in three distinct realms: the first as a tool for institutionalized domination, the second as a historical experience shaping the lives of people within the group to which the term is applied, and the third as a distinctive marker of the oppressed group, transformed into a marker of pride, resistance, and liberation. In *Tinieblas*, all three realms are present, independently and singularly represented by the various male characters and collectively by the protagonist, who shifts in status according to his progress towards

adulthood. These three realms of the concept of race are artistically linked to what Haakayoo Nobui Zoggyie understands as the three stages of African literary production in “Things Fell Apart Here Too: Reconstructing African Identity in Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo’s *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*.” First, the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, marked by concerns about the cultural clash caused by colonization; second, the stage focusing on the portrayal of abuses by the governments of new African independent states against the European metropolises, lasting from the mid-1960s until the late 1970s; and finally, the third stage, with African literary production since the late 1980s focusing on new cultural and political paradigms linked to globalization. Although written in 1987, *Tinieblas* fits, according to Zoggyie, into the first stage and not the third but is necessary for understanding why the second occurs:

He [Ndongo-Bidyogo] wanted his reader to know how the black on black oppression, so central to understanding the Macías and Teodoro dictatorships, came about. He also wanted to show why the Guinean people continued to be victims of the Spanish colonial system even though the Spaniards had been gone for almost 20 years at the time the novel was published (2013, p. 372).

This cultural clash, a central object of interest throughout the narrative, occurs internally within the protagonist and in the initiation rites of both Fang and Catholic traditions, and externally in his social interactions with agents from both worlds. A clear example is the conversation about celibacy between his uncle Abeso and Father Ortiz in the fourth section of the novel, of which he is a direct witness. In a dialectical duel in which the Fang disarms the Spaniard, uncle Abeso highlights the weakness of the Catholic arguments that defend procreation as the main objective of man while preventing priests from marrying and having children. The protagonist remembers that conversation not only for the confrontation between the two utmost representatives of both traditions in his life environment but also for how he must mediate and integrate the two worldviews.

Assmann understands memory as “the general cultural tradition of educational memory, which binds the individual to a particular region or nation” (2011, 3). The child protagonist of *Tinieblas* faces the problem of identifying and embracing his memory under a national label, the Spanish one, which forces him to reject the values and beliefs of his Fang ethnicity that have been crucial during his upbringing. In his interactions with his father and uncle Abeso, he will experience the complexity of that bond to a double tradition, and the tension between the two poles will forge an internal dichotomy in the protagonist, who will struggle with the two opposites in defining his identity: Catholic and Spanish or Fang and Equatorial Guinean. When as an adult, deciding to leave the seminary he entered in Spain and return to Equatorial Guinea, he decides to recount his story drawing from the colonial wound. This literature encompasses a range of texts that are directly linked to the imprint left by the pain, and is formed to contest imperial arrogance by the subjugated. Furthermore, this typology would encompass those works written by African or Afro-descendant authors that depict in their novels the situation of structural violence and the persistence of the colonial *modus operandi*.

In the case of Ndongo-Bidyogo's first novel, both in his African childhood, to which he dedicates most of the text, and in his adulthood in the seminary, very briefly touched upon, the story is immersed in that matrix of structural violence and the yoke of the continuity of colonial logic. The catechization of the child, culminating in his first communion, aims to break the connection he has as a Fang with his beliefs and tribal rites so that this knowledge can be despised and eliminated by him (and by all the children who, like him, are schooled and Christianized) and, thereby, eventually disappear. In this regard, the clergy exerts controlling violence over what is correct and what is not. Fang beliefs and rites are associated with superstition and sin, while Catholic beliefs and rites connect with order and salvation. The violence is physical and psychological, shifting from the individual to the collective in a dominant/dominated dynamic following the traditional metropolis/colony schema. In the seventh part of the novel, when

the nearly adolescent boy decides to enter the seminary in Spain, one of the most powerful images of the story occurs:

[...] quiero ser sacerdote les dije, y me quedé callado. Ellos se quedaron como paralizados, boquiabiertos, extrañados, asustados, ¿recuerdas?, porque no habían imaginado que estas serían tus palabras. El tío Abeso se levantó repentinamente de su sitial coronado por el caimán, escupió el tabaco que estaba mascando y se acercó a ti todo serio, y te levantaste dispuesto a correr, te entró un miedo indecible, creías que te iba a pegar, y no había razón para tener tanto miedo si nunca te había pegado ni nunca te pegaría, pero ya estabas acostumbrado a expresar el respeto a los mayores mediante el pánico, eso es lo que habían conseguido (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 137).

Upon returning from the missionaries' boarding school in the capital of his district—where he had been sent by his father—and after what he experienced there, the shadows begin to cloud his memory, diluting it, erasing it. In that process, a transfer of values occurs that attempts to equalize the two poles of the vital dichotomy he has been immersed in.

The novel is a reminiscence journey toward his childhood to deconstruct his religious vocation and rid himself of the idea of sin that has marked his life in a reassignment of values that will lead him to recover clarity. This mnemonic itinerary begins with his decision not to be ordained as a priest and leave the Spanish seminary where he presently is within the narrative time. As Assmann states, "Remembering is basically a reconstructive process; it always starts in the present, and so inevitably at the time when the memory is recalled, there will be shifting, distortion, revaluation, reshaping" (2011, p. 19). For the protagonist of *Tinieblas*, the recounting begins with what he himself understands as his reaching of maturity: "Ahora o nunca, ya estoy preparado para afrontarlo todo, que venga a mí el cáliz de mi salvación terrenal, recobrar mi identidad individual y mi identidad colectiva, no pasar por esta vida sin dejar un fruto duradero" (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 15). Having the courage to prioritize his Fang roots and respond to the dominant, seeking as he says "earthly salvation," will connect him with some crucial events in his awakening. Assmann asserts that, unlike the memorization process, remembering is not a deliberate act.

An individual simply remembers something or does not remember it. Something becomes internalized within being, and only afterwards do we become aware of it: “Memory is not a protective container but an immanent power, a driving force that follows its own rules” (Assmann, 2011, p. 20). The recollection of his circumcision, following the Fang tradition rite, reveals itself as an initiatory event in the protagonist’s path to his roots and true identity. As he searches his memory, he recalls the boy who, as described in the second section of the novel, faced the physical and psychological passage of circumcision with courage and significance. In that initiation rite, the narrator emphasizes the importance of his uncle Abeso and the other men of his tribe. These male figures are observed as companions with whom a vital experience is shared. It is noteworthy that during the rite, at the moment of the cut, the protagonist remembers remaining composed and calm, gaining him the respect of his peers: “[...] por eso no lloraste, pero ya la fama se extendería hasta consolidarse para siempre, eras el más valiente de la tribu” (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 45). However, shortly after, he recalls the cry he let out, “desgarrado, humano, esperanzado [...], como el primero de tu vida” (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 46). In the process of coming forth, there is a reclaiming of his uncle and the other Fang men to whom he reassures with the value that his assimilation process has taken from them. The initiation rite for the Fang, which materializes the contact between the carnal and the spiritual, contrasts with the protagonist’s first communion celebration. If everything goes as planned and very satisfactorily during the Fang ceremony, in the Catholic ceremony, at the moment of taking the first communion, the narrator will vomit and defecate the excess food he consumed the previous night during the obligatory fast. The Catholic rite ends with the protagonist fainting before all present, as described in the third section. While Fang initiation fills the boy and his father with pride, Catholic initiation fills them with shame: “la vergüenza la llevaba en mi interior y sabía perfectamente que había herido en lo más profundo a mi padre, que le había decepcionado, que le había puesto en ridículo delante de todo el mundo” (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, 86). Sin, guilt, and shame taint his experiences as a Christian

Spaniard. These three concepts will provoke the pain inflicted by the colonial system to prevent his wound from healing. It is revealing how the boy's body accepts or rejects the rites according to the community to which they are linked. Everything Catholic/Spanish is learned, trained, rationally desired but bodily and intuitively rejected. However, not until he is about to be ordained as a priest is he capable of intellectually expressing that truth, which, thanks to his black memory, is making its way through the shadows. What the boy embodies, the young man entering adulthood intellectualizes, thereby allowing his truth to surface, enabling him to become aware of it and act accordingly. He no longer needs the material reaction to understand since intellect directs his decisions. Finally, he can comprehend the difference between the lived experiences of the two doctrines that have pivoted his existence. His experiences within the Fang reality have allowed him to express himself freely, dissent, and challenge those who present him with a model of life that clashes with what the administrative-church apparatus also imposes on him. Even while disagreeing, he has always been respected by his grandfather and uncle, who are open to conversation. Conversely, in his Catholic-Spanish reality, non-obedience is received as indiscipline and silence as the best way to accept a divine order managed from the European matrix in its African branches. In the short term, it seems like violence is going to win the game in the young Fang who decides to become a priest. However, in the end, time and its effect on memory play in his favor. Thus, the act of remembering plays a central role in the mnemonic process and weaves together the entire intellectual journey that enables the narrator to embrace a new identity.

THE RECLAMATION OF ONE'S OWN VOICE

Djamila Ribeiro advocates for the concept of “lugar de fala” (place of speech) to break the silence of subaltern people (as formulated by Gayatri C. Spivak), in an effort to challenge the violence of a colonial hierarchy present in the 20th century and that culturally endures into the 21st century (Ribeiro, 2020). Breaking the silence, shouting, however, does not have to be done from a place of cultural purity, but from a space where different influences intersect in a syncretism where recognition of the group of belonging, of the community being claimed, becomes primordial. As Zoggyie argues: “Unlike Islam and Christianity, which have a reputation for rejecting anything different, their African counterparts tend to accommodate whatever edifies and reject only that which harms” (2013, p. 375). In this way, the non-priestly youth leaps towards his Fang culture by breaking with his project to integrate into the Catholic Church, which has been part of a devastating imperial project. By choosing to dedicate himself to the earthly, to his land, from an intellectual standpoint, and not to the celestial, that heaven appropriated by others, he commits to a past he has not been able to understand fully until that moment. In his justification before Father Ortiz, who is now the rector of the seminary where the protagonist studies, he claims the legitimacy of this new position without dismissing aspects of European culture that have already become integrated into the reality of his Equatorial Guinea: “África o necesita únicamente sacerdotes.. En mi país continué medroso, humilde— apenas hay médicos, ingenieros, abogados, qué sé yo..., nativos” (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 17). His country is Equatorial Guinea, not Spain. And his country needs not a limiting religious narrative but projects and services to improve the lives of Equatorial Guineans. The place he speaks of, thus, is a hybrid place that is culturally affected by European enlightened progress, although not at the expense of his own roots and cultural identity.

In this sense, *Tinieblas* suggests that however distinguished and recognized the young protagonist may be by whites, he is actually subject to denying his individual and collective black memory if he wishes to approach the white European model in its Castilian version. Frantz Fanon, in *Peau noire*,

masques blancs (*Black Skins, White Masks*), states: “As painful as it is for us to have to say this: there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is White” (2008, p. xiv). Before the Fang, the protagonist has nothing to prove, only to be who he is. As we have seen when he screams during his circumcision, that expression of pain is received with joy, as a demonstration of his integration into the group. Before whites, in his other group assimilation process, which culminates in his first communion, the protagonist learns the catechism perfectly. Since he begins his catechesis, he embarks on a path to prove he is the best. As a black boy of the Fang ethnicity, he must demonstrate that he is as good, or maybe even better, than a white boy can be. Fanon explains this process as a condemnation of any black man wishing to integrate into a white world: “Blacks want to prove at all costs to the Whites the wealth of the black man’s intellect and equal intelligence” (2008, p. xiv). This need to showcase his intellectual capability before whites is something learned by the narrator from his father: “La figura de mi padre, un negro alto, delgado, con un carácter muy firme, que había decidido en un momento impreciso de su vida pactar con el colonizador blanco” (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000a, p. 21). He is a Fang man who mimics the Spanish model of masculinity to gain some consideration from the colonizer, as shown in his dealings with Señor Casamitjana, the distributor of his coffee and cocoa, who always addresses him as “don.” However, his father does not turn his back on his belonging to the Fang world and is present, playing a secondary role, in all the ceremonies of the tribe. The protagonist, likewise, is also caught in this demonstration of intellectual superiority before the white religious authorities who regard him as an exception among his race and praise him when he meets their expectations of him. Despite this, both father and son will face a limit in their social progress due to their racial condition. As Restrepo and Rojas establish: “La idea de raza constituye la base sobre la que se establece el patrón de dominación entre colonizadores y colonizados” (2010, p. 98). Consequently, no matter how much they both progress in the world of the dominators, they will never become part of the elite of that group. The cultural clash between

the Fang world and the Spanish occurs internally within the protagonist as a child, and somewhat hints that it also does in that of his father.

Reflecting on the conflicts faced by the Fang who occupy parts of Equatorial Guinea, but also Gabon or Cameroon, under the process of supposed acculturation by Spain, it can be argued that what is at stake is not only the legitimacy of their culture. Due to the division of the same ethnic group across countries and imposed colonial language, there is also the consolidation of an African identity forged from the colonial wound. In Zoggyie's words: "*Tinieblas* is without doubt a text in which reconstructing African identity is the central goal" (2013, p. 378). The reclamation of a system of defining references for one's own African identity, Pan-Africanism, becomes the only form of opposition to both the colonial elite and the new elite of independence, but will be precisely driven by the situation of oppression. The fact of linking the identity of a community to a nation-state is a European imposition that clashes with the reality of the African continent. The very idea of the nation-state is a colonial imposition. Thus, what happens to the protagonist of *Tinieblas* is not very different from what might be happening to a child in similar conditions in Benin or Senegal. In this sense, racism has granted the racially marginalized a specific "place of speech" (Ribeiro, 2020) that does not depend on the country from which they narrate but on a race-continent combination. Hence, beyond a hyper-nationalist consciousness of an Equatorial Guinea that officially speaks Spanish, or of Cameroon that speaks French, there is a collective identity that develops under the wound inflicted on the native population by physical force and the legal and cultural imposition of an alien value system. This consciousness is central to combat institutionalized racism, as Lerner asserts: "Institutionalized racism depends not only on the factual manipulation of resources and power, but also on the manipulation of meaning systems and symbols in the interest of white elites" (1998, p. 189).

The colonial wound emerges as an action matrix against an imposition of a system of meanings internalized since childhood, which, according to Ndong-Bidyogo (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000b), can only be

overcome by traversing the white shadows that precede the light of black memory. Such memory remains in shadows for the acculturated subjects. Ndongo-Bidyogo proposes a journey that allows for the reclamation of an identity outside of coloniality. For this, it is essential that their story, that of these colonial subjects, is told and known. The presence of literary but also historical and cultural production that covers the Spanish colonial period in Equatorial Guinea is necessary for historical memory to travel beyond white-peninsular events. Djamila Ribeiro reflects in this direction by stating that “a simple question that helps us reflect is: how many black authors and writers have the reader [or] the reader who went to college read or had access to during their degree?” (2020, p. 63). Ndongo-Bidyogo responds to this question in various interviews (Ugarte, 2004; Odartey-Wellington, 2006; Phaf Rheinberger, 2019), asserting that the presence of literature written by Africans or Afro-descendants in Spanish education is practically non-existent because there is an absolute erasure of the Spanish colonial reality in Equatorial Guinea.

CONCLUSION: THE MEMORY OF THE WOUND OR THE WOUND OF MEMORY

In “Spain at the Crossroads: Imperial Nostalgia or Modern Colonialism?” Alda Blanco asserts:

Historians of 19th-century Spain—with the exception of Josep Fradera—have marginalized, if not erased, Spain’s modern imperial history from their historical narratives because they have chosen to privilege other narratives: the stories of Spain’s complex liberal nation-building project; its uneven capitalist development; and its national identity formation (2007, p. 3).

As Ndongo-Bidyogo proposes, the oblivion is even deeper regarding Equatorial Guinea, which was a Spanish colony until 1968. The ignorance of

this fact and the consequences of that dominion creates situations of lack of memory that can only be reversed with the reading of texts that attempt to explore the shadows. This fact is central to combating the existing racism in Spain. As Mignolo points out: “La raza no se relaciona con el color de la piel o la pureza de sangre, sino con la categorización de individuos según su nivel de similitud o cercanía respecto a un modelo presupuesto de humanidad ideal” (2007, p. 41). Questioning that model is a task that the protagonist of *Tinieblas* can only successfully carry out by becoming aware of his roots. The condemnation to the blindness of white memory can only be transcended by remembering the emotional and formative abuse exercised from the colonial power. Fra-Molinero argues that the dark aspect for the young man becoming aware of his identity is the cultural world imposed by whites, not the rituals and beliefs of blacks:

La tiniebla será en cierto modo el mundo misterioso de los blancos, los españoles, España, el seminario, el Padre Ortiz, los signos de identidad que el protagonista ha ido aprendiendo a identificar con el Poder y que quiere hacer suyos. El seminarista guineano de la novela va a viajar al corazón de las tinieblas blancas, y en el proceso va a comprobar que su memoria e identidad africanas van a recibir un serio embate (2000, p. 51).

Tinieblas focuses on critiquing the harmful imposition of a senseless dominant group over another dominated to justify economic colonialism under the pretext of modernity. Ndongo-Bidyogo concentrates on the ecclesiastical apparatus as a source of symbolic violence whose end is acculturation and the cultural erasure of native ethnicities. Nsue Otong reinforces this idea, explaining that Ndongo-Bidyogo does not delve deeper into the military and commercial apparatuses that are also exercising their oppression:

No quiso hacer una crítica global del sistema colonial español en Guinea Ecuatorial, sino centrarse en un aspecto del mismo: la acción misionera de los religiosos españoles en Guinea Ecuatorial durante el periodo colonial. Esto es lo que explica la ausencia de muchos otros personajes dentro del sistema colonial, como podrían ser los comandantes, los capataces europeos de las empresas agrícolas y forestales, los funcionarios de la administración colonial (2000, p. 58).

Of the three writers with whom this chapter opened, both Javier Cercas and Antonio Muñoz Molina have gained a social and intellectual preeminence that places them at the center of Spanish cultural activity in the 21st century. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo has not enjoyed the same attention and recognition. The fact that his story takes place in Río Muni and that its protagonists have no direct ties to peninsular Spaniards has kept him sidelined from the cultural status quo until the second decade of the 21st century. However, in a new wave of resonance, he is managing to bring to light the story of a recent and ongoing past. He himself asserts in “Literatura moderna hispanófono en Guinea Ecuatorial” that in his first novel, he tries to reflect the conflicts of his people and the tensions between tradition and modernity to recover a collective memory, highlighting the colonized subject as the substrate of African identity today (Ndongo Bidyogo, 2000b, p. 42).

The non-priest is confirmed as a marginalized individual, a displaced person, a diasporic figure who rebels against that imposed destiny and chooses to become an agent of change who does not renounce the duality of his upbringing but understands that the path to the future lies in recognizing an identity that has been repressed and must be expressed. The activation of a black memory that highlights the reasons for the wound caused by the colony is an effective way to confront the racism present in contemporary Spanish society, which Afro-descendant authors like Desirée Bela-Lobedde or Lucía Asué Mbomio Rubio, to name a few examples, are denouncing in their artistic production.

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Memoria negra: catolicismo, colonia y doble corazón en Ndongo-Bidyogo

Resumen: Este artículo analiza cómo Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo utiliza la memoria literaria para revisar el pasado colonial español, especialmente durante el auge de las novelas sobre la Guerra Civil y la dictadura. La memoria en Guinea Ecuatorial, marginada y olvidada, aparece como un espacio desde donde cuestionar las narrativas posfranquistas. El autor destaca prácticas afectivas que permiten a la amnesia colonial española enfrentar su historia silenciada. A partir del concepto de “herida colonial”, el capítulo propone estudiar la literatura ecuatoguineana desde un enfoque intelectual, no victimista, capaz de desafiar relatos dominantes e incorporar el colonialismo a la memoria histórica y cultural española.

Palabras clave: Ndongo-Bidyogo. Herida colonial. Guinea Ecuatorial. Memoria.

Memória negra: catolicismo, colônia e coração duplo em Ndongo-Bidyogo

Resumo: Este artigo argumenta que Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo utiliza a memória literária para revisitar o passado colonial espanhol, frequentemente ignorado durante o auge dos romances sobre Guerra Civil e ditadura. Ao centralizar a memória da Guiné Equatorial, espaço historicamente marginalizado, o autor expõe vazios afetivos e territoriais que sustentam a amnésia colonial pós-franquista. Enfrentar essa história esquecida torna-se fundamental para combater o fascismo contemporâneo. Baseando-se no conceito de “ferida colonial”, o capítulo defende o estudo intelectual da literatura equato-guineense, rejeitando abordagens vitimistas, para desafiar narrativas dominantes e integrar o colonialismo à memória histórica e cultural espanhola nos debates políticos e acadêmicos atuais.

Palavras-chave: Ndongo-Bidyogo. Ferida colonial. Guiné Equatorial. Memória.