

Editor's Note

The inauguration of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States, and the first African American president in the history of this nation, is the single most important event in recent memory. This unprecedented and even magical experience will impact people of African descent all over the world, in ways previously only imaginable. That an African American has become the leader of the most powerful country in the world suggests that history can no longer continue to unfold in a conventional manner. In fact, history, as we know it, has been halted and a new age has begun. Perhaps this is the *ricorso* Vico had described in *The New Science* (1725), that is, a repetition of a cycle because the previous one had gone off course; the *ricorso* is an opportunity that history affords itself to correct past mistakes. The Age of Obama has ushered a new day in which people of African descent will become more visible and occupy an increasing number of prominent positions of influence and power. Afro-Hispanics and African descendants all over the world will unite and celebrate Obama's African ancestry, which reinforces the pride the *Afro-Hispanic Review* has promoted as an indispensable part of our heritage. With his election, a much-needed dialogue on race matters will move to center stage and validate this important interpretation of history.

In this note, I want to underscore two important events I attended in March and April of this year. One was "The 1st Annual Conference of Afro-Latin American Studies," sponsored by the newly formed *Negritud: Revista de Estudios Afro-Latinoamericanos*, at Clark Atlanta University. The other was "Between Three Continents: Rethinking Equatorial Guinea on the 40th Anniversary of its Independence from Spain," at Hofstra University. Both were extremely exciting and intellectually stimulating, and the organizers, Luis Miletti, Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, and Baltasar Fra-Molinero, should be congratulated.

The conference on Equatorial Guinea was a truly amazing experience, especially because it captured a moment, not as a past event, but as it unfolds in the present. The Equatorial Guinean situation is dynamic and fluid, and not without its controversies. Writers, critics, and government officials, difficult at times to bring together, accepted to share the same stage. There were writers present who reside in the home country, for example, María Nsue Angüe, and others who live in exile, like Donato Ndong-Bidoyogo, Francisco Zamora Lobo, and Justo Bolekia Boleká. Two high-ranking government officials, Her Excellency Purificación Angüe Ondo, ambassador to the United States, and His Excellency Agustín Nze Nfumu, ambassador to the United Kingdom, attended the conference. While the presentations on literature, human rights, politics, the law,

and economics, among others, were thought provoking, there was a continuous undercurrent that linked all of the sessions. This pertained to the political control Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who had overthrown the former dictator Francisco Macías Nguema, has over the independent nation we all gathered to celebrate. As it was to be expected, the government officials defended their politics, the writers in exile were critical of the lack of liberty, and the intellectuals residing at home were careful with their words, avoiding politics and preferring to talk about their literary works. Since I cannot profess to be an expert on Equatorial Guinean studies, I found it fascinating to reconsider how the issues of identity, hybridity, race, gender, and post-coloniality in the Americas gain an additional dimension when studying the effects of Spanish colonization on this sovereign Sub-Saharan country. The Equatorial Guinean participants openly embrace Spanish culture, even though those living at home continue to mistrust the intentions of the Spanish government. There are Spaniards who have lived for many years in Equatorial Guinea and consider their roots to be not in Spain but in their adopted country; in some respects, they feel like exiles and long for the years when Spain ruled over her colony. Colonization was followed by independence, which was followed by oppression, and the recent discovery of oil has given the current government greater economic power. As the third largest producer of oil in Sub-Saharan Africa, Equatorial Guinea is a country that will play an increasingly important role on the world stage. Whether living at home or in exile, Equatorial Guineans are longing to construct a national discourse and culture.

The Negritud conference was much smaller, intimate, but no less important. It did not enjoy the financial support secured for the Hofstra Conference. Unfortunately, given the current economic climate, the requested funds were not available to cover the expenses of invited guest speakers (Mayra Santos Febres, Blas Jiménez, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy). Like the Equatorial Guinea event, the papers of the Negritud conference were also interdisciplinary. The fields of literature, linguistics, music, film, and photography were represented, and covered many of the cultures in Latin America. We all attended each other's sessions, spent time with old friends, and made new ones. After all, this is a fundamental and valuable component of any conference. The next one promises to be larger and will be held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

As I had mentioned in a previous "Editor's Note," Vanderbilt University has acquired Manuel Zapata Olivella's archives. The acquisition could not have been accomplished without the desire of Edelma Zapata Pérez and the support of Paula Covington, our Latin American bibliographer, and Pablo Gómez, her assistant. I am grateful for their commitment to allow Vanderbilt University to

catalog among its prized holdings these important documents. The collection is housed in the Jean and Alexander Heard Library and consists of approximately 120 boxes, measuring some 90 to 100 linear feet of materials. These include manuscripts, letters, interviews, newspaper and scholarly articles, audiocassettes, slides, and pictures. The audiocassettes are interviews that underscore Zapata Olivella's efforts to document and preserve the passing oral traditions of Afro-Colombians. The interviews, conducted in the decade of the seventies, are of enormous ethnographic and literary value.

While writing the introduction to Jonathan Tittler's translation of *Changó, el gran putas*, to be published by Texas Tech University Press, I was compelled to review Zapata Olivella's early versions of the novel. They are contained in two boxes labeled 26A and 26B. The first is the most interesting of the two. It gathers early notes Zapata Olivella wrote to himself; some indicate that he was reading the *Iliad*, *Don Quijote*, *El Lazarillo*, but also Faulkner and Fanon, when preparing the novel. Others instruct him about what to do and write. There is even a small notebook about Father Pedro Claver, which would later become part of the section on the maroon leader, Benkos Biojo. This box also protects a manuscript mostly handwritten and partially typed, on the back of other typed manuscripts and papers that were available, with titles such as "La identificación de Kru." Zapata Olivella drafted sections of the manuscript as he traveled throughout Europe and South America, as indicated by the stationery letterheads used to continue the flow of ideas. There is even a telephone message pad with his writings. In one of the notes to himself, Zapata Olivella describes the novel as follows:

La historia del Putas nace de la necesidad de hacer conciencia (y de hacerme conciencia) de lo que el negro representa en su hazaña americana. Es como detener en un momento el curso de la historia del negro para preguntarse, que soy yo, es este andar en que voy metido en la historia...

Here and elsewhere Zapata Olivella highlights the significance of the historical dimension of his characters and the use of magic. He refers to the time when Armstrong set foot on the moon and read from the Bible as a magical and dazzling moment. For the author, one must understand magic in order to appreciate technology.

A cursory reading of these pages points to the development of characters and topics. Some of these include "La consagración del negro," "El rechazo del Putas," "El nacimiento del Putas," "La noche de los brujos," "La quema," and as I read further into the manuscript, it becomes more coherent, especially with "La quema," about Claver and Sacabuche. I should convey that the author envisioned

a character by the name of Bandana who, in the final version, is named Ngafúa. Of most significance are the poems that appear at the outset of *Changó* and are dispersed throughout the various sections of the novel. Some include “Invocación de Nagó a Elegba,” “Historia de Changó,” “Invocación a los Ancestros,” and “Bandana despidiendo al Muntu encadenado.” In this first draft of the manuscript, the poems appear collectively, as if Zapata Olivella had written or envisioned them together, and they make up almost half of the manuscript. The second box contains a much more polished typed manuscript, which resembles what became the definitive version of the novel.

One of the many gems of the Zapata Olivella archives is an unpublished novel, *Itxao, el inmortal*, which follows in theme the racial concerns this prolific author expressed in many of his works. The beginning chapters of this manuscript are offered to the reader for the first time in the present issue of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*.

Finally, as I have mentioned in the previous “Editor’s Note,” the fall issue of the *Afro-Hispanic Review* will focus on Equatorial Guinea. Guest editors, professors Benita Sampedro Vizcaya and Baltasar Fra-Molinero, are gathering materials for this monographic issue. If you are interested in contributing to *AHR* 28.2, please contact them.

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Editor