

Strategic Positions of Las Hijas del Sol: Equatorial Guinea in World Music

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Very little attention has been paid to Equatorial Guinea's cultural works both in African and in Hispanic studies. Even less space has been dedicated to the country's women's lives and music. In this essay I aim to fill part of that void by examining the works of the group called Las Hijas del Sol, since according to a website from a cultural critic in Equatorial Guinea "this group can put the country on the global map."¹ Indeed, this duo formed by an aunt and her niece, Paloma and Piruchi, achieved world recognition with their first recording *Sibèba* in 1995. From then on, their subsequent works *Kottó* (1997), *Kchaba* (1999), *Pasaporte mundial* (2001) and *Colores del amor* (2003), all produced in Spain, have kept the group at the top of the World Music Charts Europe.² The importance of studying these works in the field of contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies derives from the fact that, although belatedly in comparison to England or France, Spain has recently become an openly multicultural society, not only through the official recognition of the different historical nationalities of the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia, but also through the presence of increasing numbers of immigrants.

The specific case of the Equatoguinean community living in Spain dates, in fact, back to the 1960s, a period in which a select group of youths from the former colony of Spain (at the time officially considered a province) came to study at Spanish universities with the aim of becoming the leaders of the country that would obtain its independence on October 12, 1968. Unfortunately, their first president, Macías Nguema, soon became one of the worst dictators in

Africa, and the number of exiles and political refugees fleeing to Spain increased.³ Nevertheless, the plight of the Equatoguineans is little known, because in 1969 the Francoist government forbade the publication of any news coming from the former colony. This information was declared *materia reservada* in an effort to hide the failure of the decolonization process in Equatorial Guinea.⁴ As a consequence, the cultural production of the Equatoguineans is little known today, but I would argue that it deserves our attention. As the critic Homi Bhabha points out, the immigrants that travel from former colonies to the metropolis offer a new view of the nation:

The Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national identity. (6)

My analysis of the music of Las Hijas del Sol will foreground the different activities and movements that show how contemporary Spanish cultural production is closely linked to politics, and how it is manifested at three levels: ethnicity, nationality, and global links. Through reflection on how these three issues are manifested in the works of Las Hijas del Sol, we will not only learn how Equatoguineans contribute to Spain's multiculturalism, but moreover, how they mirror Spanish society.

Ethnicity is often used in the conception of social groups although its meaning and content are constantly negotiated depending on the context. Ethnic groups are based upon relationships that are constantly constructed rather than on linguistically and culturally homogeneous entities.

The social anthropologist, Thomas Ericksen, has written:

Ethnicity emerges and is made relevant through social situations and encounters, and through people's way of coping with the demands and challenges of life. (1)

Further, says Ericksen, ethnicity refers to those "aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive" (4). The relational basis of ethnicity, with attention to the boundaries of language, culture and political organization, become recurrent issues in the records of Las Hijas del Sol.

Their songs can be analyzed as instruments that enable the establishment of ethnic cultural differences both in Equatorial Guinea, in relation to the Fang and Ndowe peoples, and in Spain where they point to the elements that make them distinctive among other African immigrants and Peninsular ethnic groups.

The first recording of the group *Sibèba* from 1995 is dedicated to the Bubi culture, native to the singers. The record, according to the booklet that accompanies it, is dedicated "to all those that make efforts to defend traditional ways of life and to underplay the barbarisms of a poorly understood modernity" (my emphasis). *Sibèba* offers a compilation of traditional Bubi songs and legends that pertain to different aspects of the Bubi culture, such as "Boto I" (a song for the rite of fertility), "Rea" which deals with the moon and sisterhood, and "O wato wa baye" which is about Bisila, the mother goddess of the Bubi people. The songs are in the Bubi language, with translations in Spanish; many are a cappella arrangements that

recover the rhythms and the cultural distinctiveness of the Bubi ethnic group.

Amidst criticisms of a lack of authenticity among the other ethnic groups of Equatorial Guinea, the record reached number twenty on the World Music Charts Europe in 1996.⁵ It gained a following among Western audiences. Produced in Spain by the alternative music label Nub negra, the publication and reception of this record deserves our attention. While world music in Spain has yet to catch on with the Spanish public, the success of *Sibèba* seems to appeal to Western audiences' desire for the exotic. Playing with that expectation, the record has two different jackets, which changed according to the place where it was distributed.⁶ The front cover produced in Spain has a photograph of the singers dressed in traditional Bubi raffia skirts and elaborate hairdos as they play Bubi bells. The front cover used for selling the same record in the rest of Europe and the United States presents a close-up of Paloma and Piruchi in modern dress, while the back cover pictures them in raffia skirts. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of people in Equatorial Guinea wear Western clothes. One is more likely to see traditional dresses in old photos than on the country's streets. It is clear that the use of non-Western clothes and symbols from "far away lands" on both jackets emphasizes tradition and ethnic difference by exoticizing them.⁷

In Spain the fetishized representation of otherness is presented in two ways: visually and culturally. This insistence on reinforcing the possible authenticity of traditional music and blending it with modern forms of production and reception through the singers' traditional appearance can be related to two historical connections between Equatorial Guinea and Spain. During the colonial period, the Bubi people were

the group that suffered the strongest acculturation to Spain. Cultural erosion continued after independence when the Nguema family (members of the majority Fang group) took control of the government. The Nguemist discourse imposed a politically motivated, personalized, and falsified view of the national culture and history, eliminating other Fang, Bubi or Ndowe perspectives. So much so that, as M'bare N'gom states, Equatoguinean culture became "mutilated culture" (*Diálogos* 21). The Nguemist policies, which continue to this day, have driven Bubi culture to the brink of extinction.⁸ Many years after the imposition of Spanish culture, the historical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries that distinguish the Bubi people from other Equatoguineans are now represented and re-created for the Spanish public through the exotic aesthetics, themes, and language of the records. Looking at the past, and acting from the metropolis, the use of the singers' photographs dressed in native garb for the jackets of *Sibèba*, as it was marketed in Spain, can be interpreted as a counterpoint to the consequences of Spanish colonization.

In addition, the marketing of Las Hijas's records contributes, visually and culturally, to what Isabel Santaolalla has identified as the "escalation in the propagation of 'ethnically loaded' images, rhythms, and stories" in contemporary Spain (56). By emphasizing their distinctiveness among the Equatoguineans, the Africans, and all the other incoming immigrants, Las Hijas affirm alliances with other aggrieved ethnic groups, both in Spain and the world. Through broadly accessible and appealing music, these Bubi singers are passing along the histories and indigenous knowledge of their place of origin as they struggle against material deprivation and cultural oppression.⁹

The tradition that Las Hijas want to recover offers several distinctive characteristics, according to the lyrics in *Sibèba*. When Paloma and Piruchi say in the song “A batyo bö lökò” (“People from here”) that “elo batyö bö lökò/ ëtyö a bötyö e takiö” (“My people, tradition is above everything”), they state their goal to record dances, social practices and a system of beliefs that identify them as members of the Bubi ethnic group.

The Bubi culture distinguishes itself from the others of Equatorial Guinea for having a matriarchal lineage and a religious belief system in which the goddess Bisila (with similarities to the Virgin Mary) occupies a place of honor. This religion believes also in “mmo we carichobo,” or the female spiritual protector of the family, and in “wairibo,” or female spirit that protects the individual, the community and the whole ethnic group.¹⁰ In the social realm, matriarchy determines that the Bubi people organize themselves according to maternal lineages, a practice that establishes relationships around the mother and her children, never around the father and his descendants. Artistically, these social and religious tenets manifest themselves in dances and songs dedicated to the goddesses that protect the community, to the power of women, and to the work and suffering of women in contemporary life. In addition, one frequent metaphor personalizes the African continent as a woman. For example, in the fourth record, *Pasaporte Mundial*, the song “África, nombre de mujer,” sung in Spanish in the first track and in the Bubi language in the last one (“África ilá rá waisó”), insists on viewing Africa as a mother suffering for her children, an image frequently repeated through their other recordings.

One of the immediate results of re-creating these songs that show the practices

and beliefs of the Bubi ethnic group is that the records themselves become an official text that testifies to the existence of a repressed way of life. Reinforcing their own oral tradition, Las Hijas provide a permanent registry (both for new immigrants and for Spaniards) of a culture that is in danger of being forgotten or erased under the pressure of the Nguemist dictatorship. In light of this, the fact that the lyrics of the first work, *Sibèba*, emphasized ethnic identity and Bubi tradition, the music and the marketing of the record seems a strategic choice of survival on the part of the group rather than a lack of authenticity or interest in financial gain.

At the same time, while there is a temptation to establish a binary opposition between tradition and modernity (as portrayed on the two record jackets of *Sibèba*), I believe, following the African philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe, that this dichotomy is not productive. Mudimbe links tradition with history in the sense that both reflect ever-evolving diachronic patterns. In this view, the static binary opposition between tradition and modernity is not justified because tradition means discontinuities through a dynamic continuation and a possible conversion of legacies. From this perspective, tradition might be viewed as *history in the making*. Tradition is in a state of flux, and it simply cannot be packaged like a museum piece. In fact, “history in the making” is the cultural practice of Las Hijas del Sol.

This musical group is making history by incorporating rhythms and cultural points of reference that belong to the past of the Bubi people. At the same time they illuminate the needs of present times by adapting the wisdom conferred by their ethnic tradition. Such is the relationship between two songs of *Sibèba* (numbers three

and fifteen) which can be analyzed as an examination of the concept of nation. A sense of national belonging is presented from the perspective of a citizen of Equatorial Guinea who, for economic and/or political reasons is forced to live in Spain. “A ba’ele” (The Foreigners), the third song, is sung in the Bubi language and deals with the problem of immigration. “Tirso de Molina” (number fifteen) is sung in Spanish and incorporates the same topic, treatment, and music, but with a more commercially familiar rhythm.

The choice of “Tirso de Molina” as a title is interesting for the way it illustrates the transformation of tradition in modern contexts. Tirso de Molina is a famous Spanish playwright who belongs to the Spanish canon because of his representation of what some call the “major questions of the Spanish soul.” Tirso de Molina is also a popular subway stop in Madrid where many immigrants sell inexpensive clothes, handbags, jewelry, and pirated records. The lyrics deal with the difficulties of being a foreigner and the processes of negotiation necessary to surviving within two or more cultures at once. Similarly in the Bubi cultural tradition, the third song (“A ba’ele”) deals with the tribulations of being an outsider in an unknown land—resonances of which we hear in “Tirso de Molina.” “A ba’ele” calls listeners’ attention to the complexities of the problems of being an outsider; the fact that it was chosen as the soundtrack of the film *Taxi*, directed by Spanish filmmaker Carlos Saura, attests to its having had an effect.

The political underpinnings of Las Hijas’s music is also manifested by the performers’ critical eye toward a Spanish nation that imagines itself as multicultural yet cannot assimilate the racial, religious, and economic differences of the incoming immigrants. At this level, their songs provide

listeners in Spain with material for self-contemplation as former colonialists both in America and Africa, while the Spanish nation suffers (and enjoys) the consequences of immigration.

In a similar fashion, the need for renewal of the conceptualization of nation is directed at their own country through songs like “Oro negro” from the *Kottó* record, “Elo wi pöriëba” [“Every day that you wake up”] and “Llévame” from *Kchaba*, as well as “Mosquetón de Madera” from *Pasaporte Mundial*. These compositions address the problems of social inequalities that politicians governing the nation not only ignore but frequently make worse. These songs allow the audience to hear the voice of people who live outside their homeland but still want to effect an impact in their nation of origin.

For example, “Oro negro” presents a complaint in Spanish against the negative effects that the extraction of oil has among the Bubi community and the majority of the population on the island of Bioko:

Somos pobres agricultores
sin dinero ni oro,
pero nuestra ilusión
fueron nuestras tierras fértiles
que poco a poco se fueron destruyendo
por causa del petróleo.

Dispossessed of their lands by the government in the rush for economic growth and shut out of the political and social organs of representation, the “*agricultores*” suffer the consequences of oil company investments that began in 1995 while the ruling class benefits.¹¹ The fact that the country has been recently called “The Kuwait of Africa,” (as Gabón used to be recognized) signals a failure in developing natural resources and a fair access to wealth, as opposed to an economic

advancement of the nation. By addressing the economic inequality in the Guinean nation, Las Hijas have become agents of social awareness and possibly of transformation.

In a similar vein, the song “Elo wi pöriëba” (“Every day that you wake up”) (*Kchaba*) shows in an even more urgent tone the problems of living in a country where the state controls all the resources. The composition offers the point of view of a woman who, upon waking up every morning asks herself “¿Ka ërihwem a rëiiè?, ¿ka nnete nka rëiiè?” (“What will my family eat?, What will I eat?”). These cries not only reflect the situation of the majority of the population, they also serve as a strong criticism of politicians whom Robert Klitgaard calls “Tropical Gangsters.”¹² Economic and political corruption is widespread in Equatorial Guinea, which is handled, according to Silverstein, like a “family bank.” Indeed, president Obiang’s son Gabriel is the Minister of Mining and Energy, which includes oil resources, and the other son, Teodoro, heads the Ministry of Forests and Environment as the owner of the two largest logging companies in the country. While the income derived from the nation’s business is invested in luxury cars and private mansions, 90% of the population lives in shacks without electricity or sewage systems (Silverstein 17).

The Nguemist oligarchy has forced the formation of a diasporic community of Equatoguineans who for political or economic reasons has fled the country. Still, despite their absence from the country, migrants such as Las Hijas want to exert an influence over their nation. Especially in Spain but also performing for European audiences, these two artists sing the plight of their people.¹³ In alliance with groups of resistance and exile associations—such as

the one that publishes the online newspaper *La Diáspora*¹⁴—Las Hijas propose new conceptions of the nation by performing, supporting, or sharing alternative ways of belonging to Equatorial Guinea.

The songs of Las Hijas del Sol point to the failure of Equatorial Guinea as an independent nation since it has been unable to put into practice the principles of its independence: liberation of its people from colonial powers and the creation of citizens’ rights. As the critic Emmanuel Yevah has pointed out, the nation has become a contested construct as creative writers and intellectuals, disillusioned by the broken promises of independence as well as by human rights abuses of dictators, have turned their creative endeavors into weapons to challenge, indeed to deconstruct, the nation, or what Jean Franco has called in another context “any signified that could correspond to the nation.”¹⁵ The songs of Las Hijas, similar to those of Fela Kuti in Nigeria, to whom they dedicate their third record, *Kachaba*, perform the dual role of both entertaining and exposing the rulers and the systems of nation states that oppress their citizens. In this case, especially when they sing in Spanish, their music establishes a bridge between the receiving nation, Spain, and the immigrants, mostly Africans forced to search for new communities of affiliation.

As the people whose displacement and erasure provide the preconditions for the modern nation state, these singers, like other native people, often feel compelled to assert their allegiance to entities both smaller and larger than the nation state (Lipsitz 138). As stated earlier, one clear intention of Las Hijas is to reassert and/or revive a cultural tradition that differentiates them from other groups. This intention, by itself, is one of the manifestations of an ongoing revaluation

of local identities throughout the world, often accomplished through a global language: music.

The global impact of the works of Las Hijas can be analyzed in terms of three interrelated spheres: the popularity of world music, the increasing use of Spanish in their songs and the connections with other displaced groups throughout the world, usually as a manifestation of postcolonial conditions.

The relationship with populations who experienced colonization can clearly be seen in songs like “Africa, nombre de mujer” (*Pasaporte Mundial*), “Grito libre” (*Kchab*), or “El niño africano,” which closes the record *Kottó*. This final song establishes a contrast between Africa and Europe: “la sonrisa de un niño europeo me hizo ver la tristeza del niño africano.” These words point to the global inequalities of power and the marginalization of Africa. They also establish a connection between the African diaspora and the attempt to create social consciousness of African problems. In short, Las Hijas call for the reincorporation of the continent into the global dialogue:

Yo quisiera ayudarte [Africa], y voy
andando]
 para llegar con mis manos tan lejos
 por eso canto por ti
 para que nadie, al escuchar mi voz
 pueda olvidar a esos niños
 cuya sonrisa hace tiempo se perdió.

The presentation of oppositional situations in this song reflects the context of oppressive power relations in which questions of Black and White, poverty and privilege, South America and Africa, and the West, have highly charged emotional and ideological meaning. By positioning themselves as a point of connection between these re-

alities, the singers trespass their ethnic and national borders of identity and situate themselves within the global majority of dispossessed people.

Similarly, the increasing use of the colonizing Spanish language to express the plight of disenfranchised people, accompanied by musical arrangements that reflect Caribbean and South American influences, enables the singers and their audience to enlarge their own communities. The switch from their native language in their two first records to Castilian Spanish in most of *Pasaporte mundial* and *Colores del amor* after having been recruited by the multinational corporation, Zomba records, has sparked criticism for excessive “modernization” and incorporation of Western cultural references.¹⁶

Nevertheless, in my opinion, appealing to an international market constitutes a strategic choice. While at the beginning of their careers the path for capturing the attention of the Spanish and international audiences was closely connected to their ethnicity, eight years later, their ethnic difference did not guarantee them the same space in Spain. With increasingly problematic attitudes toward African immigration in the Peninsula, Las Hijas needed to reassert their difference among other groups of color. Possibly confused with other Africans from Senegal, Gambia, and Nigeria, Paloma and Piruchi chose to foreground the cultural contacts with the receiving society in their two last records.

By singing in Spanish and displaying their knowledge of Spanish cultural codes they ironically demonstrate that the “civilizing mission” of the Spaniards in their country has been successful. Their pronunciation of Castilian Spanish reaches a degree of perfection which is hard to imitate

by other recent African immigrants. By showing commonalities with other Hispanic musical communities, such as *salsa* and the romantic *canción española*, they are clearly incorporated in the worlds produced after the Spanish colonization of the Americas, thereby broadening the possibilities of world-wide recognition of their community.

In a parallel way, the appropriation of the apparatus of commercial music through their classification into World Music has resulted in a willing acknowledgement of for-

recognize them and sing one of their songs, such as “¡Ay, corazón!” which made it to the top of the Spanish pop charts in 2002.¹⁷ Their pioneering work in rereading both their native culture and that of the colonizers by deploying music as a weapon to transform alliances and identities has, without a doubt, benefited and influenced the work of other immigrant artists such as Radio Tarifa (Sudán), Raisha (Sudán), Wafir (Sudán), Baron Ya Buk Lu (Equatorial Guinea), Bidinte (Guinea Bissau), and others, who find Spanish audiences informed and eager to enjoy their works.

The launching of Las Hijas’ career from Spain, or what is called “the Western world,” can be considered a strategic choice, albeit not a necessary point of departure for social activism or artistic success. Located in Spain, and performing for European audiences, the plight of their people can be heard by a wide international audience. In contrast with other African artists like Fela Anikulapo Kuti from Nigeria, to whom they dedicate their full third record *Kchaba*, as well as Tabu Ley Rochereu, Omar Pene, Baba Maal, Bembeya Jazz, all of whom achieved great recognition and fought for social causes in Africa before they were known abroad, Las Hijas confronted two main problems in Equatorial Guinea to achieve the success they currently enjoy. The difficulties they encountered arise first from the absence of an infrastructure in Equatorial Guinea able to produce and commercialize the records, and second from a lack of intellectual and artistic freedom. In fact, it was only when Donato Ndongu was the *director adjunto* of the Centro Cultural Hispano-guineano in Malabo that there were both alternative venues for artistic production and an intellectually open means of presenting these works. It was at this time that Las



Hispanic Guinean Cultural Center, Malabo.

eign minority ethnic groups in Spain. While at the beginning of their career their performances with Manu Chao, Cappercaille, and Rita Marley won them the admiration of a small sector of the Spanish audience, their present influence is such that a large majority of the Spanish public can easily

Hijas won a singing competition there with their first hit. It is my contention that this moment marked the culmination of their career in Equatorial Guinea, a career that would have incorporated them into what I would call “the presidential entourage.” Given these very real limitations, moving abroad was the logical consequence.

In conclusion, the aforementioned tendencies in the music of Las Hijas del Sol make for connections among dispossessed ethnic groups throughout the world. They also provide bridges not only to similar Hispanic musical groups but to native Spaniards whose sense of injustice in the face of global material disparities is enhanced as they listen to the music. Using the World Music market as a medium for advancement of their themes and careers, Las Hijas have demonstrated that local, national, and global connections are important artistic conceptions. As a consequence, world ignorance about Equatorial Guinea is being challenged by their works. Further, the marketing of their songs becomes a political tool that counters not only the politics of the Mongomo clan in the government of Equatorial Guinea but also the vestiges of the Spanish *materia reservada* decree. The artistic endeavors of Las Hijas not only place Equatorial Guinea on the global map, they also participate in the reconstruction of Spain as a multicultural society. As postcolonial citizens, these artists have given new meaning to Spanish multiculturalism through their self-insertion into the metropolis and the incorporation of their Spanish colonial education into their music. Perhaps eventually Spain can expand its cultural horizons and sing with Las Hijas del Sol the following words from their album *Pasaporte Mundial*:

No hay tiempo que perder,
el mundo es de los valientes... deprisa,
deprisa]

tu tienes que aprender
que la vida es distinta
de lo que tu crees
únete a su juego
tratando de ganar
o a ti te hace falta un pasaporte mundial
a ti te hace falta un pasaporte mundial.

Notes

¹ For the web site see Nbé Ondó. This site offers one of the most comprehensive and well-rounded introductions to the country, including sections dedicated to history, geography, social issues, and different cultural sections. It must be noted that the name of Patricio Nbé is a pseudonym protecting the real identity of the author.

² The World Music Workshop of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) regularly publishes data on online and print magazines such as *Rootsworld* (USA), *Folkroots* (Great Britain) or *Radio Nacional de España*. Las Hijas' records were listed in the EBU World Music charts as following: *Sibèba* was number 10 in January 1996 and 9 in February 1996. *Kottó* got to number 8 in the May 1998 list while *Kchaba* was listed number 4 in April 2000 and number 8 in May of that same year.

³ Here I am following the studies authored by M'bare N'gom, Liniger Goumaz, Samuel Decalo, and Ibrahim Sundiata. For example, Goumaz points out that:

After independence, the quick development of Macías Nguema's personal power triggered a considerable flow of exiles, which in 1979 numbered as many as 120,000—including 65,000 in Gabon (official estimate), 35,000 in Cameroon, 5000 in Nigeria, and 9000 in Europe (of which 8500 went to Spain). (*Historical Dictionary* 142)

The number of exiles that went to Spain is limited in comparison with other countries. Many of them were studying in seminaries since this was the main channel the Spanish colonial administration offered to natives for an advanced education. The consequences of this exodus were far reaching in the cultural field since, as M'baré N'gom shows in his groundbreaking book *Diálogos con Guinea*, most of the literary works by Guineans during the '70s and part of the '80s were produced in exile, especially in Spain (22, 23, 25, 26).

⁴ As the historian Max Liniger-Goumaz points out, censorship of the mass media was used both in Equatorial Guinea and in Spain. In his *Historical Dictionary of Equatorial Guinea* he explained that at the time of Macías's dictatorship:

All correspondence is controlled by the Guardia Nacional and the Presidency; the foreign press is stopped at the border; the radio no longer broadcasts bulletins, except Macías Nguema's speeches, and school books are strictly censored. Spanish scientific works on Guinea were burned in public in 1972. Likewise, from 1970 to 1976, no incoming information from Equatorial Guinea was published in the Spanish press. (31)

As a consequence of this lack of circulation of news, very few people of the Spanish younger generations can establish the historical link that unites Spain to Equatorial Guinea.

⁵ Although I am aware that the term "authenticity" is a very problematic one, here I am reporting the comments of other Guineans I interviewed on the summer of 2001. While most Guineans expressed their satisfaction at the recognition that Las Hijás was gaining for their country, many of them also insisted on establishing a difference between what they perceived as authentic, or what they had heard in Guinea while growing up there, and what was being presented in Las Hijás' records.

⁶ To see the record covers please visit the websites of Nubenegra and Patricio Nbé Ondó.

Because of copyright issues, these illustrations cannot be included in this paper. Nubenegra produced the three first records of Las Hijás. On their web site, they present the records with the jackets used for the Spanish market. The records' covers used worldwide are offered by Patricio's website, which, as commented earlier, also offers a review of Las Hijás's career.

⁷ Here I am following the analysis of Jocelyne Guilbault on transnational musical practices. She analyzes how World Music blends modern and traditional music and represents this fusion in graphic terms through the design of the record jackets ("Beyond de 'World Music' Label" 2).

⁸ According to the U.S. Department of State's report on Equatorial Guinea for 1999, the country's government has a very poor record on human right practices, especially in its treatment of the Bubi people, an ethnic minority in the country. The U.S Department of State's website states that:

The Government's human rights record remained poor. Serious and systematic human rights abuses continued and the security forces committed many serious abuses. Citizens continued not to have the right to change their government. [...] Discrimination against minorities, particularly the Bubi ethnic group on the island of Bioko, worsened in the wake of the January 21 revolt by Bioko separatists in which between six and nine persons, including some government officials, were killed. Security forces reportedly broke into Bubi houses following the coup attempt, raped Bubi women, and looted Bubi homes. In some instances, security forces threw the belongings of Bubi into the streets and encouraged passersby to help themselves to the property. The Government continued to restrict labor rights; no labor unions exist, and strikes are prohibited by law. Abuse of workers'

rights was particularly serious in the oil industry. (1-2)

⁹ Most artists try to build their career on the originality, quality and depth of their cultural production. Although it can become problematic to value Las Hijas' works based of their recovery of their Bubi ethnic identity, I would argue that their originality and creativity in the music world is linked to their ethnicity. The World Music praise for the originality of Las Hijas' first record, *Sibèba*, stood closely related to the fact that they sang in the Bubi language, traditional Bubi songs, with references to Bubi rituals, habits and gods. It is this difference with other groups that made them "original" among the rest of the African and World music productions of the moment and which won them the attention of a wide public. But, while this evaluation of originality would be granted only by the audience (based on the difference that the public could perceive as making them not Fang, Ndowe or from other groups), the singers themselves claim to be singing these songs to preserve their tradition, that of the Bubi people, both on the record cover and in the words of the songs. I see here a conscious effort of the singers to preserve that difference—their language and cultural points of reference—to set themselves apart as different from other people and, therefore, grouped as Bubi. This effort is not only clear in their first record, but also in the second *Kottö* and in the third *Kchaba*. Maybe an insistence in these differences is not productive in light of the political problems that the country is going through, but at the same time, I see this action of singing in the Bubi language and talking of the specifically different characteristics of their culture as a counterpoint to the "ethnicization of the (Equatorial Guinean) state" that professor M'baré N'gom comments on *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial* (21 forward).

¹⁰ Please see José Eteo for a more comprehensive analysis of the Bubi culture.

¹¹ Several articles published by the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, and other newspapers have pointed at the fact that the oil revenues have helped to increase the gross domestic product, but most of the gains have

remained in the members of the government's hands, especially the family members of president Obiang.

¹² In his book entitled *Tropical Gangsters. One Man's Experience with Development and Decadence in Deepest Africa*, Klitgaard relates his experiences in Equatorial Guinea as an administrator of a World Bank project in the country, which he considered "one of the most backward countries in the world" (ix).

¹³ Many African artists have strong support in their communities of origin in terms of numbers, infrastructure, and politics, which allows them to focus their career in their countries and expand through Africa and the world. In contrast, in Equatorial Guinea, there was only one musical production company owned by Teodoro Nguema, the son of the president, when I visited the country (2001). Javier Espinosa also mentions that Teodoro Nguema has a recording studio in the United States, but I was not able to buy any records produced there during my visit to Equatorial Guinea. All the records sung by Equatoguineans and produced by Nguema, happened to be—ironically, in my opinion—more expensive than those imported from Zaire, Nigeria and Cameroon. In addition, and more to the point I try to make, all of these records show a lack of creative or political freedom. See for example, the following tapes and CDs: *Ototong Mokoc* by Saxcisav Cirilo, *Explosion/eboladja djebol (ologu nnam)* by Waye Me Nben, *Tradición* by Raperos, *Desesperación* by La Orquesta Machosky Internacional, have at least one full song dedicated to Papa Obiang (the president of the country). Others, like *Love* by Alex Morris, *El reino de dios* and *Bisusu Diciembre* by Sita Richi, mention both Papa or Mama Obiang in the songs. I realize there is a practice among griots to praise the people that economically support them or request their performances, but I think this music does not offer any connections with the griot tradition. In this narrow intellectual environment, looking for an alternative venue for cultural expression seems necessary.

¹⁴ For information about one of the opposition parties, which has its central offices in

Spain, see RENAGE (Resistencia Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial).

See also the electronic publication *La Diaspora*, in which Guineans living all over Europe and America share their views on the country's situation.

¹⁵ Cited by Emmanuel Yewah in "The Nation as a Contested Construct" (1).

¹⁶ Zomba Records works in Spain with El Retiro ediciones musicales, S. L. Zomba Records is the world's largest musical company, representing artists like Justin Timberlake, N.S.Y.N.C., and Britney Spears.

¹⁷ Probably due to their signing with Zomba records, Las Hijas songs are now better recognized outside of Europe. Their song "Africa (Ilá rá Waisó)" sung in Bubi from *Pasaporte Mundial* (2001) has been used in the sound-track of the USA film *The Wild Thornberrys* (2002).

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