

José Antonio de YTURRIAGA BARBERÁN, *Guinea Ecuatorial: Cincuenta años de independencia* (Madrid, Sial/Casa de África, 2018) pp.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of Equatorial Guinea, José Antonio de Yturriaga, career diplomat and PhD in law, has published this book with Sial. This publishing house has published several works on Equatorial Guinea, targeted at the small Spanish public interested in the country, mainly made up of former settlers and their descendants and the handful of academics who study it. As the author himself explains in the prologue, the first part of the book consists of his 1965 thesis for the *Escuela Diplomática* (Foreign Service School), which the Francoist authorities did not let him publish at the time. He reproduces it here with a few additions and contemporary comments. The second part deals with Equatorial Guinea's evolution in the final stage of the decolonization process and during the two successive Nguemist dictatorships, i.e. Macías's (1969-79) and Obiang's (since 1979). In the end, he concludes that "the colonization was mediocre and the decolonization almost exemplary". The first half of that statement is at odds with his 1965 account of the colony, especially during the Franco era, which offers a clearly positive view of the colonizing work carried out by the regime that emerged from the *Alzamiento Nacional* (National Uprising). If he thought the colonization was mediocre at the time, he offered no indication in his work. The exemplary nature of the decolonization process refers to the response given by the Spanish Foreign Ministry, then led by Javier María Castiella, to the insistent pressure from the United Nations to decolonize the territory via its unitary independence. However, the book does not conceal the efforts to oppose Castiella's policy made by Luis Carrero Blanco's Ministry of the Presidency (the Spanish Cabinet Office), which effectively controlled the territory at the time through the general governors and commissioners general. Nor does it refrain from criticizing its attempts to undermine the Foreign Ministry's policies. The decolonization was exemplary insofar as it was peaceful and ultimately guided by the democratic framework that the UN had called for. However, viewed in the light of Castiella's clear and documented aim of establishing a neocolonial regime akin to those established by France in many of its former colonies in the region, including neighbouring Cameroon and Gabon, it was a resounding failure. This failure began with the electoral victory of the candidate who had shown the greatest hostility towards Spanish colonialism and its plans for decolonization, Francisco Macías Nguema. In the September 1968 election campaign, Macías successfully harnessed the widespread resentment towards whites after decades of humiliations and discrimination (something the colonial apologists have never managed to explain).

The book ends with a 26-page bibliography divided into five sections, which includes many

works not cited in the text and repeat entries in multiple sections, as well as errors in titles and authors' names. Nevertheless, the author properly cites the sources actually used in the notes.

The first part of the book, based on the 1965 thesis, offers an overview of the colony's geography, population, economy and history based on colonial sources (hence, the plainly colonialist perspective). With regard to the history, it places special emphasis on Spain's title to the territory under international law and the protracted conflict between Spain and France for control of the Rio Muni region in the 19th century. In contrast, it has little to say on the matter of colonial society and, in particular, the colonized population. The problem with this perspective is that we now know much more about these issues than we did in 1965, thanks to authors such as Sanz Casas, Sundiata, Nerín, Castro, Ndongo, Díaz Matarranz, García Cantús, Creus, Okenve, Martino or Sant Gisbert. What was surely a more novel contribution at the time was the study of the decolonizing pressure exerted by the UN and the Foreign Ministry's responses (Chapters 4 and 5). However, today we also have a much stronger grasp of this subject as a result of Alicia Campos's magnificent book on the decolonization, Rosa Pardo's studies of Castiella, and the estimable memoirs of Jaime de Piniés, then member of the Spanish delegation to the UN.

The summary offered in the extensive Chapter 6 of the fifty years of independent Guinea, subjugated to the two Nguemist dictatorships, is not new. However, it does offer a good introduction to the subject for those who are relatively unfamiliar with the country. Yturriaga focuses on its political and economic evolution and its relations with Spain and other global powers. His sources include the works of Max Liniger-Goumaz, Adolfo Obiang Biko, Donato Ndongo, Emiliano Buale Borikó and Fernando Abaga, as well as certain works produced at the *Escuela Diplomática*, such as those by Terencio Ngundi and Mansueto Nsi-Owono. In addition, he draws especially heavily on Paula García Ascanio's commendable undergraduate thesis at Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Djongele Bokokó's epilogue for one of Liniger-Goumaz's books. With regard to the end of the decolonization period, he falls victim to certain widespread misconceptions regarding, for example, Macías's candidacy in the 1968 election.

Yturriaga takes a very harsh stance in the book against the current dictatorship of Obiang Nguema. In the dedication, he wishes that the Equatorial Guinean people will achieve "a free and democratic country in the near future". In this regard, he does not seem to join the varied chorus of Spanish politicians calling for a policy of unabashed support for the Equatorial Guinean dictator, invoking Spain's interests, their shared Hispanicism and, even, the need not to judge Africans by the same standards as leaders from other parts of the world.

The book ends with an emphatic call for Spanish support for the positions of the Guinean democratic opposition: "The Spanish government must rid itself of its complexes and fear of being labelled neo-colonialist and help establish democracy in Equatorial Guinea." However,

this eloquent willingness is somewhat blunted by the fact that it comes just pages after the author reproaches Spain's king and prime ministers for not visiting the (reviled) dictator Obiang to strengthen ties with his country, when they have no scruples meeting with dictators from other continents.

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