

# Equatorial Guinea

## In brief



 SPA [Guinea Ecuatorial](#)

### origins

The State of Equatorial Guinea, officially known as *República de Guinea Ecuatorial*, became independent on 12 October 1968.

### other names

*Guinea Española* (Spanish Guinea), until 12 October 1968.

### abstract

Portuguese navigators began to visit the Gulf of Guinea as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but Spain and the Spanish language were not present in the area until the signing of the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1777) and the Treaty of El Pardo (1778), through which Portugal ceded sovereignty over the island of Fernando Poo and the adjacent mainland territories to Spain, in exchange for other territories in South America. Due to the huge difficulties involved in the undertaking, Spain was unable to exert any effective form of control until 1843, when the expedition by Juan José Lerena y Barry took place; 1858, when the first Spanish governor, Carlos de Chacón y Michelena, was appointed; or in 1875 and 1884, when the two expeditions of discovery by Manuel Iradier took place. Although the colonial powers that met at the Congress of Berlin (1884-1885) agreed to grant Spain some 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> on the continent, due to a lack of interest in the matter and due to France's voracity, the final borders of Spanish Guinea landed up being 28,052 km<sup>2</sup>. This consisted of the Fernando Poo (now known as [Bioko](#)), Annobón, Corisco, Elobey Grande and Elobey Chico islands, and the mainland territory of [Río Muni](#). All of them achieved independence in 1968 under the new name of Equatorial Guinea (EG). Since then, Spanish has remained the official language and the main language of

communication between the different EG communities. The *Academia Ecuatoguineana de la Lengua Española* (Equatoguinean Academy of the Spanish Language) was founded in 2013. In addition, two main Bantu languages are spoken: Fang is spoken on the mainland and Bubi on the island of Bioko. In the coastal strip of Río Muni, there are a number of minority languages, which are also based on Bantu. In addition, there are two Creole languages, one based on English – Pichi or Pichinglis –and another based on Portuguese – Annobonese – typical of the island of Annobón. As regards translation, the Claretian missionaries were responsible for culture and education since their arrival in the colony in 1883. From the start, and in accordance with the evangelisation models used by Spain in other parts of the world, they implemented a complete programme of translation of biblical, liturgical and catechetical texts from Spanish into the local languages. As a result, from very early on, their disciples began to write and publish in Spanish in colonial times, laying the foundations for a rich post-colonial literature in Equatoguinean Spanish and making it the only Spanish-speaking country in sub-Saharan Africa. This phenomenon has begun to attract an international audience, with numerous translations. Some Equatoguinean writers have published bilingual volumes of their works: *A Bépátto (Los del Barrio)* (2017) by Justo Bolekia (1954-) was first written in Bubi and then self-translated into Spanish.

**record**

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# Entry



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## Introduction



*Flag of Equatorial Guinea. Source: [Wikipedia](#).*

Portuguese explorers began visiting the Gulf of Guinea as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. As regards what would eventually be known as Equatorial Guinea, in 1471, they discovered the island of Annobón and in 1472, Fernão do Poo discovered the island that would bear the name of the main explorer of that expedition, [Fernando Poo](#). However, Spain and the Spanish language were not used in the area until the signing of the [Tratado de San Ildefonso](#) (Treaty of San Ildefonso) (1777) and the [Tratado de El Pardo](#) (Treaty of El Pardo) (1778), by which Portugal ceded sovereignty to Spain over the islands of Fernando Poo and Annobón and the adjacent mainland territories, in exchange for other territories in South America: the future Brazilian provinces of Santa Catarina and Río Grande do Sul, north of Uruguay. Also in 1778, a military expedition under the command of Don [Felipe de los Santos Toro y Freire](#), Count of Argelejo (1721-1778) originally from Montevideo, took official possession of the territory, which cost him his life.

Due to the huge difficulties involved in the undertaking, Spain was unable to exercise any form of effective control over these and other smaller islands until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, it was not until 1843, when the expedition headed by [Juan José Lerena y Barry](#) (1796-1866) took place. As commander of the brigantine Nervión, he proclaimed Spanish sovereignty once again over Fernando Poo, expelling the English from it, and annexed other islands in the region to the Crown of Spain. During this same period, the first settlements were being established on the mainland. In 1858, Captain [Carlos de Chacón y Michelena](#) (1816-1863) took office as the first Spanish governor in the Gulf of Guinea.

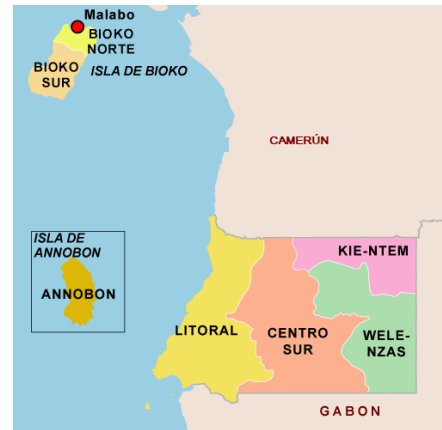
The expeditions of discovery played a decisive role after those years. Of note are the very heroic efforts by [Manuel de Iradier y](#)

**Bulfy** (1854-1911), originally from Vitoria, with expeditions from 1875-1877 and 1884-1885 throughout all the territories that the Treaty of San Ildefonso had granted to Spain, which were funded through its own Africanist association [La Exploradora](#), founded in 1873.

Another key date was 1883, the year of the arrival of the *Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María* (Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) or **claretiano** (Claretian) missionaries, who would thereafter be responsible for the education and culture of the colony.

Soon after, the European colonial powers met in Berlin (1884-1885) to agree on the so-called «[reparto de África](#)» (Scramble for Africa).

Although Spain was entitled to some 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> on the mainland, the lack of real interest in new colonial adventures, the national crisis of 1898 and the voracity of France resulted in the permanent borders of Spanish Guinea covering only 28,052 km<sup>2</sup>: the islands of Fernando Poo (now known as Bioko), Annobón, Corisco, Elobey Grande and Elobey Chico, and the mainland territory of Río Muni.



*Map of Equatorial Guinea*  
(Source: [Afrol News](#))



*The statue of Manuel Iradier in Vitoria. Source: [Wikipedia](#).*

The cession was sealed in the [Tratado de París de 1900](#) (1900 Treaty of Paris), but it was not until 1904 that Spain permanently occupied the mainland territory with the creation of the Spanish Territories of the Gulf of Guinea or Spanish Guinea. Eventually, two provinces were established in 1959: Fernando Poo and Río Muni, which were granted autonomy in 1964 and were finally granted independence on 12 October 1968. Equatorial Guinea was born (for more historical information, see: De Castro Antolín and De la Calle Muñoz 1992; De Castro Antolín and Ndongo-Bidyogo 1998; Bolekia Boleká 2003; De Castro Antolín 2017; De Yturriaga Barberán 2018; Ndongo-Bidyogo 2019).

Since then, Spanish has remained the official language and the main language of communication between the different communities in the country. The [Academia Ecuatoguineana de la Lengua Española](#) (AEGLE – Equatoguinean Academy of the Spanish Language) based in the national capital, Malabo (formerly known as Santa Isabel) was established on 8 October 2013 and has been a member of the Association of Spanish Language Academies since 6 March 2016. Furthermore, there are two main Bantu languages: **Fang** or Pamue, spoken on the mainland, while on the island of Bioko, **Bubi** is spoken. In the coastal strip of Río Muni, there are several minority languages, including Bantu languages: **Benga**, **Kombe/Ndowe**, **Baseke**, **Balengue** and

Bujeba (languages spoken by the coastal population). Two Creole languages should also be included, one based on English, pichi or Pichinglish, the main language of communication throughout West Africa (*pidgin English*), and another based on Portuguese, annobonés, typical of the island of Annobón. There are therefore a total of ten languages in use, seven being Bantu and three that were introduced (Quilis and Casado Fresnillo, 1995).

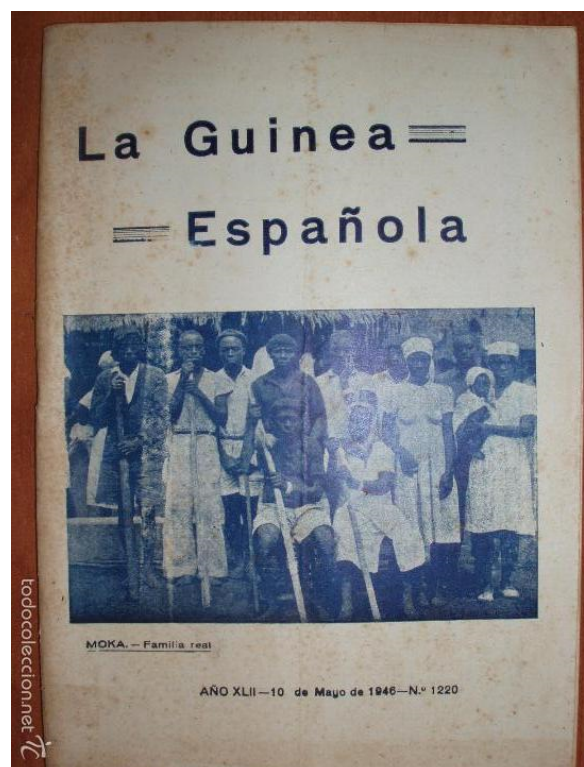
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## ¶ Equatorial Guinea and translation

Regarding translation, as already indicated, the Claretian missionaries were responsible for culture and education from the time they arrived in the colony in 1883. From the start, and in accordance with the evangelisation models used by Spain in other parts of the world, such as America and the Philippines, they implemented a complete programme of translation of biblical, liturgical and catechetical texts from Spanish into the local languages (Zarandona 2002). Tomás L. Pujadas, author of two monumental volumes on the ecclesiastical history of the Church in Equatorial Guinea, the first one dedicated to Fernando Poo (1968) and the second to Río Muni (1983), highlights the huge work of "discovery" of the native languages that the missionaries had to learn word by word, phrase by phrase, idiom by idiom, apart from its phonetics, its syntax, its orthography, and how this laborious work was necessary to understand the natives of this land, to communicate with them and to teach them the "cosas de Dios" ("things of God") in their language (Pujadas 1983: 515). He also offers us a catalogue of catechisms, books on spirituality, gospels, devotionals, religious canticles, etc., translated into the native languages of the place (516-518). These works are of huge interest because in 1983, the second volume of Pujadas' work was published in commemoration of the first centenary of the arrival of the Claretians in Guinea.

An outstanding example of this bibliography would be the little book entitled *Sango Eyamu* in 1958, also published to commemorate the arrival of the Claretians in this territory, albeit seventy-five years before. It consisted of a compilation of the Gospels of all the Sundays and holy days, was translated into the target language of Benga by Father Miguel de los Santos Saborit. As can be easily deduced, the target audience of these volumes consisted of listeners rather than readers, as they were read aloud during mass or catechesis. It was unlikely that Benga speakers would have been able to read and write in their own language.

The Claretians also founded a missionary journal, *La Guinea Española*, the first issue of which was published in 1903 at the Seminary of Banapá, Fernando Poo, which

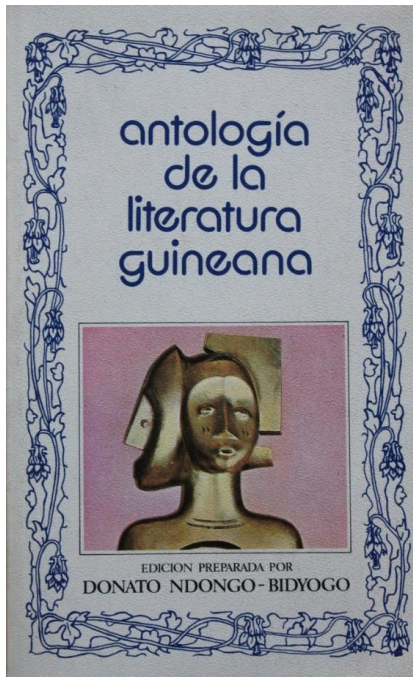


was to become the cradle and hub of the first cultural expressions in colonial Guinea. From the start, it included sections such as “*Página literaria*” or “*De nuestra biblioteca africana*”, which were open to contributors from the colony. In issue 1165, dated 10 January 1944, a literary competition was organised for “*plumas coloniales*” (“colonial writers”) although no native Guineans sent in their contributions. This is why shortly afterwards, in 1947, a new “*Plumas coloniales*” section was included, which was dedicated specifically to locals. The purpose was to collect traditional tales, stories, narratives, legends, proverbs and songs, put them in writing and help preserve them. There was a massive response by students from the Catholic missions, who devoted themselves to collecting, transcribing and, above all, translating into Spanish the traditional stories and poems told by their elders (Ndongo-Bidyogo 1984: 17-18). As a result, Guineans soon began to write and publish in Spanish from colonial times, moving away from transcriptions and translations to increasingly personal texts, thus laying the foundations for a rich post-colonial literature in the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea, the only country in sub-Saharan Africa to have Spanish as an official language.

*La Guinea Española, the foundational journal of Guinean literature translated into Spanish. Source [todocolección](#).*

This work of compilation, transcription and translation was continued over time by the [Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano](#), with offices in [Malabo](#) and [Bata](#), the main town in Río Muni, sponsored by Spanish cultural cooperation programmes. It consists of four volumes published between 1990 and 1992 under the leadership of the anthropologist [Jacint Creus](#), who compiled the traditional tales of the Ndowes (Creus 1990), Fangs (Creus and Brunat 1991), Annoboneses (Creus and Brunat 1992) and Bubi (Creus, Brunat and Carulla 1992) of Equatorial Guinea. The first of these already sets the tone for the rest of the volumes: the book contains more than a hundred Ndowe folk tales grouped into various cycles. Collected at the end of the eighties with the collaboration of local informants, they were translated from the original oral language, which was recorded, transcribed and published to ensure their preservation. In addition, in an “*Apéndice*” (Creus 1990: 225-277) twenty-five stories, out of all the stories with Spanish versions earlier in the volume, were also published in the Ndowe language. From a translation perspective, this is considered to be extremely interesting. The other three volumes each contain another twenty-five stories in the Fang, Annobonese and Bubi languages. The greatest effort was made with the stories written in Annobón's own language, because according to the compilers, there was no real standardisation of this language, which had hardly been written until then (Creus and Brunat 1992: 159).

A few years earlier, however, a fundamental cultural event had taken place which contributed to the creation and consolidation of



a Guinean national literature. [Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo](#) published his “*Antología de la literatura guineana*” in 1984, which was a huge surprise that left many people in awe. In the same cover, it is stated that the book is the first sample of the written literature of Equatorial Guinea, an African Spanish-speaking country whose cultural expressions had not been widely disseminated until then either abroad or among Guineans themselves. It consisted of two sections, one of poetry, with seventeen authors, and another of narrative literature, with thirteen authors. Several authors were included in the two sections, reviews by each author were provided, many of the texts were unpublished, and there were examples from colonial and post-colonial times. It was a foundational milestone or a launching pad for the literature of this African nation. In addition, the author completed his work with an introduction, “*El marco*” (Ndongo-Bidyogo 1984: 11-46), which can be interpreted as the inaugural manifesto of this literature, which he defines as “*incipient, black African*” and “*Hispanic*” (11). Likewise, the decisive role played by the rich oral tradition in the native languages of the Guinean peoples in this literature in Spanish is highlighted, albeit with numerous peculiar localisms or Guineanisms of local Spanish (21-22, 31-35).

In 2000, a new, broader and more ambitious compilation was published: *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial (Antología)*, under the responsibility of Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo and M’Baré N’gom. In addition to grouping texts by genre, they are arranged chronologically within various historical stages. It continues to include useful biobibliographical news of the authors (447-463), as well as an extensive bibliography, among other paratexts. Years later, as Equatoguinean national literature became increasingly consolidated, a third, even more complete and complex anthology was published: *Nueva Antología de la literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial* (2012), by M’baré N’gom and Gloria Nistal Rosique. By then, this literary phenomenon was well established (for more information on the literature of Equatorial Guinea, see: Carrasco González 2000; Zarandona 2001: 371-384; N’gom 2003; Trujillo 2012: 855-907).

*Antología de la literatura guineana (1984), a foundational book by Ndongo-Bidyogo.*

Moreover, this phenomenon has begun to attract an international audience through translation. Without claiming to be exhaustive, as other poems, short stories, essays or other short texts translated for magazines or anthologies in countless languages are not included, one cannot fail to mention, for example, the novel *Ekomo* (1985) by [María Nsue Angüé](#) (1945-2017) which has been translated into French under the title *Ekomo. Au coeur de la forêt guinéenne* (1995). *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987) by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (1950- ) has been translated into French, *Les Ténèbres de ta mémoire* (2004) and into English, *Shadows of your Black Memory* (2007). *El metro* (2007), by the same author, has an Italian version available, *Il metrò* (2010). *Löbëla* (1999) by [Justo](#)

[Bolekia Boleká](#) has been translated into English under the same title, *Löbëla* (2015). *Matinga, sangre en la selva* (2013), one of the novels by [Joaquín Mbonío Bacheng](#) (1956- ) has been translated into French under the title *Malabo Littoral* (2015). Also, *Arde el monte de noche* (2009) by [Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel](#) (1966- ) has been translated in the following order: into English, under the title *By Night the Mountain Burns* (2014); into Finnish, *Yössä vuori roihuaa* (2017), and into French, *Dans la nuit la montagne brûle* (2019). Another of his novels, although not yet published in Spanish, *El juramento del Gurugú*, has already been translated into English under the title *The Gurugu Pledge. A Novel* (2017) and into French, *Sur le mont Gourougou* (2017). Finally, the feminist success of [Trifonia Melibea Obono](#) (1982-) *La bastarda* (2016) already has been translated into English, *La Bastarda. A Novel* (2018) and into French, *La bâtarde* (2020).

It is also worth noting that some Equatoguinean writers have published bilingual volumes. *Löbëla* (1999) by Justo Bolekia Boleká is a collection of poems written in Spanish, but with numerous words and phrases (verses) in the Bubi language. Translations of these are only occasionally provided. Years later, Bolekia published an anthology of his own: *Poesía en lengua bubi. Antología y estudios* (2007), a bilingual compendium of poems and poets in the Bubi language and in Spanish, from the oral tradition kept in the collective memory through the creations of contemporary poets, including that of the author himself. Most of the compositions are available in Bubi and in Spanish as a result of translation. Finally, the same author published *A Bépátto (Los del Barrio)* in 2017. In the prologue, Bolekia himself confesses that with this book he claims his “*bubinidad*” by offering complete poems in Bubi, with translations into Spanish featuring immediately afterwards (9-10). In other words, clear examples of self-translation can be observed. Thus, “*A Bépátto*” (17-21) and “*Ö mö'anda mué Ésaasi Eweera*” (43-50) are followed by their translations, “*Los del Barrio*” (23-27) for the former and an untitled poem for the latter (51-58); or “*Löbëla*” (29-31) and “*Cuando no estás*” (33-36), for example, combine stanzas in Spanish and Bubi.

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## Research potential

Translation is essential for the study of the literature of Equatorial Guinea. The translation work from Spanish into the local languages of the country by the missionaries has not been sufficiently studied. Spanish translations or versions of the oral literature of the Guinean peoples during the colonial period or throughout the post-colonial era have also not received as much attention as they deserve. In other words, using Paul Bandia's expressions (2008: 163-184), the study of the *first phase* of translation from oral to written text, typical of the African colonial and post-colonial worlds, still has a lot to offer in this Spanish-African context. Homi Bhabha calls this *hybrid language*, the result of the combination of indigenous orality and foreign writing, the *third space* (2004: 301-307). Based on this concept, Remedios Fernández (2019) proposes the concept of a *fourth space* (Bandia's *second phase*) to analyse what happens when a postcolonial text that has already more or less been translated from its oral version is transferred to a second language with a different colonial tradition or without any tradition of this type. The translations of Guinean authors into languages



such as English, French or Italian present a solid opportunity for research, based on these premises, which has hardly been explored. This equally refers to the practice of self-translation by Guinean writers competent in Spanish and in one of the local languages of the nation.

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## Credits



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Professor of Translation at the University of Valladolid (Uva). He has been a lecturer at the University since 1989, where he graduated with a degree in Spanish and English Philology. He completed his postgraduate studies in translation at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and holds a PhD from the University of Zaragoza, where he submitted a thesis on the Spanish reception of the British poet Alfred Tennyson. One of his main areas of research revolves around African Studies, the results of which, always with focus on the world of translation, can be consulted on the Africana research group's website, integrated in the UVA research group "Humanistic and Cultural Translation" ([Tradhuc](#)). Zarandona is the editor of the *Hermēneus* Journal on Translation and Interpretation Studies and Vertere Monographs, as well as Disbabela, a series devoted to publishing unknown translations. Research project *Portal digital de Historia de la Traducción en España*, PGC2018-095447-B-I00 (MCIU/AEI/FEDER, UE).



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