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## Feminism in Equatorial Guinean literature: an approach to the socio-educational study of the novel Ekomo by María Nsue Angüe

*El feminismo en la literatura ecuatoguineana: una aproximación al estudio socioeducativo de la novela Ekomo de María Nsue Angüe*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to study feminist thought in Equatoguinean literature, based on an approach to the socio-educational study of the novel *Ekomo* by María Nsue Angüe, the first novel written by a woman in the history of Equatoguinean literature. The research problem focuses on the lack of academic dissemination of the study of feminist thought in the novel *Ekomo* within the literature of Equatoguinean literature in particular and in the literature of the Hispanic world in general. However, it is important to study the feminist perspective of this novel to know its socio-educational content in order to promote socio-cultural changes that allow a more equitable and inclusive society. The method used for this analysis is descriptive, based on qualitative methodology that has allowed us to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire conducted, and whose main results show that the novel *Ekomo* is feminist, because it reflects the inconsistencies of male discourses, as well as the injustices and asymmetries of gender relations in Equatoguinean society.

Existing research on this novel does not focus on pointing it out as a feminist work because of its socio-educational component for the Equatoguinean society. Therefore, the solution we propose to the problem is to study this novel as feminist because it helps to claim from literature the abandonment of aberrant cultural practices. Therefore, it is essential that a work of this nature be more widely disseminated from the academic field so that its pedagogical content is known.

## Keywords

Education, emancipation, feminism, literature, woman, novel.

## Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es estudiar el pensamiento feminista en la literatura ecuatoguineana, a partir de una aproximación al estudio socioeducativo de la novela *Ekomo* de María Nsue Angüe, la primera novela escrita por una mujer en la historia de la literatura ecuatoguineana. El problema de investigación se centra en la poca difusión académica que tiene el estudio del pensamiento feminista de la novela *Ekomo* dentro de la literatura ecuatoguineana en particular y en general de la de la literatura del mundo hispánico. Sin embargo, es importante estudiar la perspectiva feminista de esta novela para conocer su contenido socioeducativo para impulsar cambios socioculturales que permitan una sociedad más equitativa e inclusiva. El método utilizado para este análisis es el descriptivo, fundamentado en la metodología cualitativa que ha permitido analizar los datos obtenidos con el cuestionario realizado, y cuyos principales resultados ponen de manifiesto que la novela *Ekomo* es feminista, porque refleja las incoherencias de los discursos masculinos, así como las injusticias y asimetrías de las relaciones de género en la sociedad ecuatoguineana.

Las investigaciones existentes sobre esta novela no se centran en señalarla como una obra feminista por su componente socioeducativo para la sociedad ecuatoguineana. Por eso, la solución que proponemos al problema está en estudiar esta novela como feminista porque ayuda a reivindicar desde la literatura el abandono de prácticas culturales aberrantes. Por tanto, es fundamental que una obra de esta naturaleza tenga más difusión desde el ámbito académico para que se conozca su contenido pedagógico.



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## Palabras clave

Educación, emancipación, feminismo, literatura, mujer, novela.

### 1. Introduction

Following the importance of literature as an object of study of gender relations, this article focuses on the analysis of the emergence of feminist thought in Equatoguinean literature. For this purpose, the work *Ekomo*, written by Maria Nsue Angüe, a socio-educational novel that can be considered pioneering because it presents the struggle of women to break out of the patriarchal yoke in which they find themselves, has been chosen. To understand the role played by feminism in Equatoguinean literature, it is convenient to start from what this literature really is in which, since its beginnings, it has been led mostly by men. However, the incursion of the novel *Ekomo* in Equatoguinean literature has led to the emergence of a generation of women writers committed to activism and the demand for the dignified treatment of women.

Literature has been the mirror through which the Equatoguinean woman has denounced her situation within the culture, therefore, the abandonment of cultural practices that vilify women, as is the case of polygamy, levirate, gender violence, lack of consideration, dowry, etc., is a clamor that can be seen in almost all Equatoguinean women writers to detoxify themselves from the patriarchal education they have received and thus promote other values based on equality.

The problem posed in this research lies in the scarce academic dissemination of the study of feminism within Equatoguinean literature, where the socio-educational approach of the feminist novel *Ekomo* has been overvalued. Although some researches have been done on this novel, they devote little interest in the study of this novel from the feminist perspective because firstly, it shows the difficulties of women in the Equatoguinean society, and secondly, it proposes solutions for the emancipation of women, hence its socio-educational character.

Given this approach, this article defends the thesis that feminist thought appears for the first time in Equatoguinean literature in 1985 with the publication of the novel *Ekomo* by Maria Nsue Angüe. This work marked a before and after in Equatoguinean literature. A before because there are no female referents who have decided, at least from the novel, to reflect and plant a resistance and denunciation on the situation of the Equatoguinean woman within their culture. And it marks an after because it laid the foundations for many women like Trifonia Melibea Obono, Guillermina Mekuy, Anita Hichaicoto Topapori, among others, to continue writing feminist literature, thanks to its socio-educational content that allows to promote substantial changes to improve the situation of women.

In this article we want to answer the following questions: Is there an influence of feminism in Equatoguinean literature? Is *Ekomo* a feminist novel? What is the feminist impact of the novel *Ekomo* in Equatoguinean literature? Is there a socio-educational content in *Ekomo*?

To answer these questions, we will proceed to a review of the theoretical framework established for Equatoguinean literature. The main text guiding our analysis is the novel *Ekomo*, since it constitutes the epicenter from which the emergence of feminism in Equatoguinean literature is studied. Beforehand, it should be made clear that one of the difficulties involved in this type of research has to do with the lack of a theoretical and epistemological foundation on this subject, which is a real obstacle for any researcher. To this must be added the fact that gender studies are gradually emerging in Equatoguinean



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society, all with the aim of breaking the cultural barriers that prevent the empowerment of women, for which literature has been the first means of expression used by many of these women who want to see a free, educated, independent and empowered woman.

As will be seen in the section where detailed information on the methodology employed is given, this is not a quantitative study and therefore we do not provide empirical data on this issue. We are dealing with a qualitative methodological design based on the descriptive method to analyze and better understand our study phenomenon based on the existing literature on the subject. In this sense, it should be specified that this is a research with a descriptive scope of qualitative type very frequent in Social Science research because "it seeks to conduct studies of a phenomenological or constructivist narrative type, which seek to describe the subjective representations that emerge in a human group about a certain phenomenon" (Ramos-Galarza, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, the theme of the emergence of feminist thought in Equatoguinean literature is circumscribed within this type of descriptive research.

Regarding the structure of this article, it is divided into the following parts: the first part presents a brief introduction of the research problem; the second part presents a review of the literature on the object of study; the third part is a defense of the main thesis of the article; the fourth and fifth parts present the methodology used and an analysis of the results. Subsequently, the conclusions are presented, showing the results, limitations and future lines of research. Finally, the bibliography used in this article appears.

## 2. Literature review

In order to understand the reasons why feminist thought finds a niche in Equatoguinean society, it would be appropriate to present a succinct description on the situation of women in this context. In this sense, it can be noted that in Equatoguinean society, "gender relations are still perceived from the point of view of male domination" (Pérez-Armiño, 2018, p.30). This domination established by the patriarchal system is what makes many women begin to question it, to highlight that it is not a natural fact but a social construction naturalized by men to oppress or subordinate women.

When it comes to laying the foundations of the patriarchal system, as it has been defined within the feminist movement, it is held that:

Patriarchy is a political system that institutionalizes the sexist superiority of men over women, thus constituting a structure that operates as a mechanism of domination exercised over them, based on a biologicist foundation. This ideology, on the one hand, is constructed taking the biological differences between men and women as inherent and natural. On the other hand, it maintains and exacerbates these differences by postulating a dichotomous structure of reality and thought (Vacca and Coppolecchia, 2012, p. 60).

This institutionalized political system, which exalts above all the superiority of men, is brutally exercised in many places. In the Equatoguinean context, it manifests itself, for example, in polygamy, dowry, levirate marriage, gender violence, etc. In this regard, Bituga-Nchama (2020a) asserts that "the Equatoguinean woman is a product of her culture, which means that the way she is, feels, speaks or acts has been learned through a system of socialization established for her sex" (p. 148). All this allows many women, as in the case of Maria Nsue Angüe, to decide to question the culture and show how incoherent it is as far as women are concerned.



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In this order of ideas, it should be pointed out that in all cultures there are a series of traits that construct a distorted image of women. Among these are:

- 1) an ideology and its expression in language that explicitly devalues women by giving them, their roles, their work, their products and their social environment, less prestige and/or power than that given to men;
- 2) negative meanings attributed to women and their activities through symbolic facts or myths [...];
- 3) structures that exclude women from participation in, or contact with, the spaces of the highest powers, or where the spaces of greatest power are believed to be, both economically, politically and culturally. ];
- 3) structures that exclude women from participation in, or contact with, the spaces of the highest powers, or where the spaces of greatest power are believed to be both economically and politically and culturally;
- 4) dichotomous, hierarchical and sexualized thinking, which divides everything into things or facts of nature or culture, and which, by placing men and the masculine under the second category, and women and the feminine under the first, establishes men as the parameter or paradigm of what is human, while justifying the subordination of women in terms of their supposedly natural roles (Facio and Fries, 1999, pp. 21-22).

The argument presented by these two researchers makes the situation of the Equatoguinean woman a necessary demand for equality. The Equatoguinean woman is an activist, not conformist for the place that culture expects her to occupy. All this makes literature, through its different literary genres, the workhorse of many Equatoguinean women who devote themselves to the world of letters to express their emotions and concerns about their future and that of their offspring. All the dissertation presented *supra*, allows feminist thought to emerge within Equatoguinean literature. However, in order to understand the impact of feminism as a political and social theory in Equatoguinean literature, it is useful, in this regard, to offer a summary description of the nature of what is meant by Equatoguinean literature.

Generally speaking, Equatoguinean literature is a literature written in Spanish, by Equatoguinean writers. In other words, it can be said that:

The literature of Equatorial Guinea develops a theme very much in line with the surrounding daily reality (...) The objective of Guinean writers is therefore summarized in giving an account of the reality lived by themselves and their compatriots throughout the history of their country. It is a literature that is at once genre, historical and social. Indeed, most Equatorial Guinean writers make use of the rich culture of their country to develop their artistic work; for them, it is a matter of vindicating their traditions in the face of the recently arrived Western culture introduced into the country with the Spanish colonization (Otabel Mewolo, 2003, p. 121).

As a result of the above, we are dealing with a literature produced in Africa, but in Spanish. Equatoguinean writers produce literature based on their culture and history, developing themes of social impact. According to Mbaré Ngom (2003), this type of literature written in Spanish is born out of the:



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Encounter of two cultural traditions, the first, black-African and ungrammatical, has its roots in the Bantu tradition and is nourished by orality in its different modalities, and has more flexible and pragmatic expressive and aesthetic norms. As for the second, European, imported and imposed, it is based on writing and its rigid norms. African literature of Castilian expression, therefore, is based on these premises, among others, while at the same time it participates in both cultural traditions in its perception and representation of reality. Likewise, the African cultural project born in these circumstances is marked by a certain cultural hybridity (p. 3).

For Ndongo-Bidyogo (1984), one of the greatest exponents of Equatoguinean literature, the literary creation of Equatorial Guinea has gone through three periods: "From the Spanish colonization to the present, three periods have marked the evolution of the literature of Equatorial Guinea: the colonial period, the period of "the years of silence" and the period after the first dictatorship, that is, that of Francisco Macias Nguema" (pp. 28-29).

However, the subject of the situation of women had not had a special dedication since the publication in 1953 of the first Equatoguinean novel written by Leoncio Evita Enoy, with the title *Cuando los combes luchaban* (When the combes fought). For this very reason, it is somewhat complex to speak of a literature with an approach anchored in feminist thought. The first Equatoguinean novels were written by men, which may have had an influence on the fact that the theme of the situation of women in Equatorial Guinea is not so recurrent. Therefore, if the novel *Cuando los combes luchaban* is the first novel written by a man, Ekomo is the first novel written by a woman.

Within the analysis of Equatoguinean literature, there are not many female referents. An example of this is that the Anthology of Equatoguinean Literature, a work published in 1984 by Donato Ndongo Bidyogo, is full of Equatoguinean writers, where the only woman is Raquel Ilombé. All this is a sign that, for a long time, women were excluded from the field of literature, which would explain the late incursion of Maria Nsue Angüe in the world of literature. In order not to be contradictory in our argument, it should be noted that "women were absent in Guineo-Ecuadorian literature until 1978, when Raquel Ilombé's collection of poems *Ceiba* was published, making her the first Guineo-Ecuadorian woman to publish a literary work" (Bituga Nchama et al., 2022, pp. 137-138). Although Raquel Ilombé is the first woman to dedicate herself to literature in Equatorial Guinea, she did not focus on women's issues nor did she dedicate herself to the novel but rather to poetry. An example of this is in the publication of her collection of poems *Ceiba* in 1978..

To address the emergence of feminism in Equatoguinean literature, it must be recognized that there is no theoretical framework on feminist literature in Equatorial Guinea, probably due to the scarcity of studies on the impact of women in Equatoguinean literature or on gender relations in this society. In addition to this, also the diffusion of feminist thought in this society is still incipient, hence the gender perspective is not yet incorporated as normative in the gender relations that occur in this political community. For this reason, feminist literature is still in an initial phase, but it already has a road already traveled, it only remains to continue to maintain it in order not to go backwards. In fact, there are researchers who consider that:

The feminist ideology currently rooted in Equatoguinean society is forging a new consciousness where women have begun to question this education they receive from their mothers or society itself to become



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submissive, being only wives and mothers, exercising only the maternal function and attending to their husbands (Bituga-Nchama, 2020a, p. 157).

Based on the above approach, it is undeniable that there is a feminist literature in Equatoguinean society that highlights the struggle of women for equality, paying tribute to one of the goals of feminism, which is to:

A political theory and practice articulated by women who, after analyzing the reality in which they live, become aware of the discriminations they suffer for the sole reason of being women and decide to organize to put an end to them, to change society. (...) Feminism is articulated as a political philosophy and, at the same time, as a social movement (Varela, 2018, p. 14).

Feminist thought is a political and social solution to the problems of discrimination suffered by women all over the world for the mere fact of being women. Therefore, in Equatoguinean literature, these demands for equality are embodied in Equatoguinean women writers, although what prevails most is the struggle against the patriarchal culture that suffocates them and with which they have to deal. Therefore, the Equatoguinean feminist literature that begins with the novel *Ekomo* by María Nsue Angüe should be understood as a literature whose fundamental objective is the constant struggle for equality, freedom, dignity, etc. The emergence of feminist thought in Equatoguinean literature has made it possible to:

Rethink the literary phenomenon from a different perspective, since the text is seen as a space of representation of socio-affective relations between the sexes in which gender roles and ideals of gender identity are also reproduced through the assignment or labeling of gender (Vivero-Marín, 2009, p. 69).

Until now, Equatoguinean literature has been presented from the male point of view, however, from the perspectives of Maria Nsue Angüe, through Trifonia Melibea and Guillermina Mekuy, Equatoguinean literature has given women a voice, because the narrative no longer presents the standards of male characters fighting for their freedom and that of their people, but now it is about seeing how female characters have to confront the scourge of the patriarchal system that imposes stereotypes or gender roles that leave women in a status quo.

In the early stages of Equatoguinean literature, there is no feminist thought, meaning that there are women who put or reflect the plight of the Equatoguinean woman, who, out of respect and compliance with cultural norms, has to do what they stipulate, whether she wants to or not. The emancipation of women is therefore an absent clamor in literature that was born precisely with Leoncio Evita, author of the novel *Cuando los combes luchaban*.

Within Equatoguinean literature, there is a group of women who have dedicated themselves to literature, each one within her literary genre. In addition to the writers already mentioned *ut supra*, it is worth remembering: Cristina Dyombe Dyangani and Trinidad Morgades Besari. Of all these women, the one who laid the foundations of the feminist novel in Equatoguinean literature is undoubtedly Maria Nsue Angüe, without detracting from the merit of the others. *Grosso modo*, the origins of feminist thought in Equatoguinean literature appear with the publication of the novel *Ekomo*, before that, we only find literature that highlights the longing of men to return to pre-colonial Africa, or that



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vindicates the independence of African peoples, always highlighting the role of men. Although as we have indicated *ut supra*, before Ekomo there were no other novels written by women that focused on the role of women, but we do find women writers such as the aforementioned Raquel Ilombé who dedicated herself to poetry and not to the novel, nor did she focus on women's issues.

Feminism is a movement that criticizes society and, therefore, seeks above all equality between women and men. Literature is a space that has allowed women to express their emotions and experiences, but also to be very critical of the patriarchal system that oppresses them, as is clearly evident in the novels written by Equatoguinean women, which, although at first glance do not seem feminist, have a strong feminist component. This is to say that the feminist movement has allowed the politicization of many social issues that were already naturalized.

The reasons why it is possible to argue that feminism exists in Equatoguinean literature since the publication of the novel Ekomo are more than obvious. Probably the most visible is that all these writers focus on the role of women in their society and culture, on inequality, gender violence, forced marriage, sexual exploitation of women, among other things. All these issues are part of the feminist movement and although some of them do not declare themselves feminists, they are actually feminists, at least according to the way in which they present the situation in which many of them live. Therefore, we agree with Montero (2006) in maintaining that:

Feminism is also critical thinking. Its objectives of transformation require action in the field of ideas in order to subvert deep-rooted cultural codes, norms and values, as well as the symbolic system of interpretation and representation that makes sexist behaviors and attitudes, which privilege the masculine and patriarchal power relations, appear normal. In this context, feminism disarticulates the discourses and practices that try to legitimize sexual domination from science, religion, philosophy or politics (p. 171).

The influence of feminist thought in Equatoguinean literature is practically evident in all Equatoguinean writers, both those who consider themselves feminists and those who do not declare themselves as such. However, this impact is most visible in the novel Ekomo, which constitutes our object of study because it marks the path to be followed later by other women writers.

### 3. Ekomo: a feminist novel. Thesis defense

In Equatoguinean literature, it is atypical to find a novel with the characteristics of Ekomo. As has been made clear above, Equatoguinean literature in general, is represented mainly by men, women who dedicate themselves to literature are very few. However, it must be recognized that it is a number that is growing exponentially. Therefore, it should be noted that the number of women writers is growing exponentially:

Focusing on literature written by Guineo-Ecuadorian women, the names of Raquel Ilombé, Trinidad Morgades Besari and the promising young Guillermina Mekuy are of interest. But the greatest triumph of women's voice so far is the publication of Ekomo, a novel written by María Nsue Angüe (Álvarez-Méndez, 2010, p. 174).



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As has been pointed out, *Ekomo* is the first novel written by a woman, but that does not mean that it can only be considered a feminist novel. *Ekomo* is, first of all, a women's novel that belongs to what is pejoratively called women's literature, as if literature had sex/gender. For methodological reasons, it is necessary to offer a clear distinction between the terms: women's literature, women's literature and feminist literature. According to Vicente Serrano (1991):

There are those who, when they speak of "women's literature", refer to texts written only by women, and by "women's literature", they allude to texts written both by women who write as such, and those written by men who exhibit in their writing characteristics of "women's literature" (p. 72).

Feminist literature refers to literature in which both women and men use this means of expression to highlight the difficulties faced by women simply because they are women. In feminist literature, the topics are usually related to labor inequality, sexual violence, abortion, glass ceilings, etc. Therefore, one of the objectives of the feminist novel is to reflect male dominance over women. In this regard, Nsue Angüe (1985), details it as follows:

One day *Ekomo* wanted to kill me. I don't hold a grudge. The poor guy was desperate. [...], and taking the plate he had put under the bed so that the liquid would fall into it, he approached me with the purpose of pouring it on my face. By chance I happened to be lying on my side with my arms folded over my cheek, and the liquid touched my face but little, while the rest fell on my arms (p. 170).

In this sense, there is an open repertoire of themes that are circumscribed around women, whose objective in most cases is to demand cultural, social and economic changes that do not denigrate women. Reference should also be made to the fact that:

Feminist studies of women's writing start from the assumption that all writing and, by extension, all cultural production is marked by gender, but they also start from the conviction that, in the case of women's production, it is a "bitextual" dialogue between the male tradition and the female tradition, since women's literature takes place within the context of dominant male discourses rather than outside of them. For this reason, all women's writing has a double voice (Fe, 1996, p. 170).

In this regard, the argument that we present here is forceful, since we consider that the novel *Ekomo* is, firstly, a feminine novel because it is written by a woman, and, secondly, it is feminist because it demands changes for women within a culture that it considers oppressive. The information that we can give a priori is that it is a novel set in the:

Guinea from the colonial era, in the late 1950s or early 1960s, denounces the alienation and the feeling of inferiority instilled by the men of the tribe. They define women as people without much sense, with no conscience of fidelity, who have to marry to be protected, who have to surrender with fear to rituals of sexual encounters with their elders, etc. Moreover, when they marry, they belong to the husband's tribe and therefore must abandon their homes and customs, even their hobbies, as in the case of the protagonist who danced under the name of Paloma de Fuego (Dove of Fire). They are made to feel as unimportant elements, without voice and presence, in that environment in which men are the



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ones who have decision-making power over all aspects of everyday life, including marriage, motherhood, polygamy or the situation of widows. (Álvarez-Méndez, 2010, p. 175).

The last aspects of this quotation are the ones that call our attention, because seen from a feminist perspective or from the point of view of gender relations in Equatoguinean society, this novel is a pioneer for being the first to highlight the situation of women within their culture. Due to the little diffusion that Equatoguinean literature continues to have within the literature of the Hispanic world in spite of the great efforts that are being made, the novel *Ekomo* has not been very little studied. There are a few studies that have disseminated or made it visible. However, the exploration of the feminist content is very little studied, which can be understood if one takes into account that gender or feminist studies are very little developed in Equatoguinean society, the tonic is the patriarchal structure that sometimes obscures things and naturalizes certain customs, especially those that have to do with women.

At this point, it would probably be appropriate to ask two questions that seem inescapable for the understanding of this article: Is there a socio-educational component in the novel *Ekomo* to be considered important for Equatoguinean society and literature? What is there of feminism in the novel *Ekomo*?

To answer this question posed, it is appropriate to evoke the thought of Dos Santos (2011), because we consider it crucial for a better understanding of this feminist thought that is observed in the novel *Ekomo*. According to the aforementioned author:

Feminism is reflected in literature from a reflection on the role of women in society and also through the uneasiness experienced by the woman who writes, that is, on the difficulties of finding her own voice in a world, that of literature, reserved for the male sex, in which women are the object but never the subject of their own enunciation [...] feminist literature is an example of a committed discourse, understood as a type of literature that expresses the problems of a society from a fictional story, which may or may not be plausible (p. p.). feminist literature is an example of committed discourse, understood as a type of literature that expresses the problems of a society on the basis of a fictional story, which may or may not be plausible (p. 5).

The above approach fits and revitalizes the objectives of a feminist novel such as *Ekomo*, because it presents a series of obstacles that the protagonist Nnanga goes through, a woman who is torn between culture and modernity, and who must fight to break many myths that condemn her for being a woman.

Indeed, *Ekomo* is published at a time when it seemed unthinkable that a woman could write a novel in Equatorial Guinea, since there were already some male referents, well positioned and consolidated within the Equatoguinean literature in terms of literary production, such is the case of Leoncio Evita, author of *Cuando los combes luchaban* (1953), and *Una lanza por el boabí* (1962), by Daniel Jones Mathama. However, due to the situation in which Equatoguinean women lived, the conditions were ripe for the appearance of a novel that emphasized women's issues.



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Before going into the study of this novel from a feminist point of view, it is useful to offer first a short biography of Maria Nsue Angüe, the author of Ekomo. According to some research, Nsue Angüe was born in:

The province of Rio Muni, in what was then Spanish Guinea, in the year 1945, he spent the first years of his life in a small village with his family of the Fang ethnic group, of which he would always keep vivid memories and a broad cosmogony that he later captured in his stories and novels. When he was only eight years old, he traveled with his parents to Madrid. It was 1953, and at that time, Guinea was still Spanish territory, as attested by the national ID cards of some of its inhabitants. Here he did his first studies and began his literary career, but he soon returned to his native place, where he worked as a journalist at the Ministry of Information, Press and Radio of Equatorial Guinea (Alcojor, 2020).

We are dealing with a woman who had to face many vicissitudes for being a woman, both in her homeland and abroad. María Nsue Angüe passed away on January 18, 2017, but it is as if she were still alive, for she inspired a whole generation of women and even empowered many women writers. The novel Ekomo was published in 1985, thanks to the support and authorization of the National University of Distance Education (UNED). There are studies which also conclude that, due to the themes addressed in Ekomo, it is a feminist novel, the first in Equatoguinean literature. Among these studies on Ekomo are those carried out by Minsongui Dieudonné (1997), in which he emphasizes that:

Maria Nsue Angüe, with her revolutionary pen, highlights in her feminist writing the problems of the traditionalist "fang" woman of Equatorial Guinea (...) After all that has been said, we can say that Maria Nsue Angüe is a feminist writer; she defends tradition, but also fights for the emancipation of women. This position is evident when Nnanga Abaha "breaks the taboo" by touching the corpse of her deceased husband, and especially when the Pastor asks her to get up from the ground, thus putting an end to the very hard trials of widowhood (p. 218).

Likewise, another recently published study on this issue points out that:

The play Ekomo is a narrative not only about generational conflicts, Afro-feminist and identity rebellion against patriarchal and Catholic oppression, but also about cultural hybridity in which almost all the protagonists are torn between fang tradition and modernity (Keffa, 2023, p. 45)

Although it must be admitted that the novel is presented in a context very different from the current one, it must be recognized that the situation of the Fang woman has not changed much. In the novel Ekomo, Nnanga, a woman of the Fang ethnic group, one of the majority ethnic groups in Equatorial Guinea, is presented as having to marry without her clear consent. In this novel, Maria Nsue Angüe speaks of abduction, which, although no longer practiced today, was one of the forms that led to Fang marriage. For the Fang, abom or abduction was a very common practice where the man abducted the bride and took her with him to his tribe.



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For some researchers, among them Hidalgo Lopez (1993), in Ekomo, "Maria Nsue (...) emphasizes the marginal situation of women within African family structures, and its consequences of anguish that often leads to existential loneliness" (pp. 42-44). In the same vein, it can be added that in Ekomo, the odyssey of the protagonist throughout the book reflects the suffering of the woman of this era, who must blindly respect her tradition, but we also see the struggle of women for her freedom, to always choose what she wants for herself. In short, the protagonist suffers for having rebelled against tradition and the ideals of the time. It has even been said of the protagonist of this novel that:

Nnanga, with her reddish hair, is an exceptional woman, brave, strong, independent and upright, who, however, defines herself in relation to the figure of her husband, Ekomo, with whom she goes on pilgrimage in search of a cure. But, although it is the latter who gives the title to the work, the female point of view from which it is narrated is a reflection of the double subversion carried out in the novel, since it vindicates the African and, in turn, the female perspective (Álvarez-Méndez, 2010, p. 175).

Therefore, it is about a woman who fights against the patriarchal ideals of the era in which the novel is set, it serves as a testimony that evidences the harsh conditions in which all women found themselves during this time. For the first time, someone dared to capture all this struggle for emancipation in a novel, as a kind of criticism and pedagogy that exhorts consciousness towards change. The theme of this novel is a cry for the freedom of the Fang woman, in the face of the bonds imposed by patriarchy. "This Fang patriarchal system is barbaric, as the woman is only seen as an object to achieve her goal" (Keffa, 2023, pp.54-55). Ekomo is a novel divided into ten chapters, but in all of them, from a feminist point of view, it reflects a constant struggle of Nnanga to change or go against the canons that the fang patriarchal system has imposed on women. Bearing in mind that:

The fang patriarchal system is not a product of today, but rather a very long-lived system, with several centuries of existence in which the fundamental theme has always been the oppression of women. It must be recognized that women themselves also contribute to keeping this system alive. We say they contribute because, having been indoctrinated by the patriarchal system, they themselves have transmitted or reproduced the learned patterns of behavior (Bituga-Nchama, 2021, p. 220).

Maria Nsue Angüe captures in this novel the main problems that constitute a challenge for the Fang woman, marriage, polygamy, dowry, the situation of widows, the Acus or levirate, etc. All these problems are themes with which the protagonist of this novel is linked, in addition, the male leadership or androcentrism of the Fang ethnic group is perfectly reflected. Although the novel Ekomo analyzes the situation of women during a specific time, all this can be extrapolated because during the Spanish colonization, through the period of independence to the present day, the situation of women has only gradually changed, cultural obstacles to the empowerment of Fang women in Equatoguinean society still continue or persist.

The protagonist often has to evade her current reality and remember other times when she had not become a woman and was free. Therefore, in addition to being a cry for freedom, it is also a pedagogy for all women so that they do not renounce their own being because of



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certain circumstances, as happens to Nnanga in this novel. Nsue Angüe reflects in the novel *Ekomo*, a kind of feminist militancy in the struggle for the emancipation of women, in the face of an androcentric culture. For this reason, it is a novel capable of putting the reader in the protagonist's shoes, feeling her pain, her fears, her desire to be heard and consoled.

Bearing in mind that the purpose of this article is not to make a text commentary on this novel, but to analyze the influence of feminist thought and the socio-educational content of this novel, it should be pointed out that it deals with several aspects that vilify and denigrate women. Where it is clearly seen the intentions of men in qualifying and defining when a woman is worthy, when she is useful, when she deserves to be married, etc. In the first chapter of the book, it is clearly observed how men decide the punishment to be imposed on an adulteress. Thus it is stated:

In the abaha, the men discuss. They all talk about Nchama, the naughty, flirtatious woman who committed adultery yesterday in the forest. The men talk, the women are silent... this sentence remains! -shouts the old man. For the adulteress, fifty sticks in the ass. And -he continues saying while clearing his throat- for the adulterer, two goats, thirty thousand bipkuele and one hundred and fifty sticks. Because a woman is like a child. She has no conscience of fidelity. And her guilt, therefore, is lesser (Nsue Angüe, 1985, pp. 17-18).

In the above quote, the macho thinking ingrained in the Fang ethnic group is evident when determining everything. The woman is compared to a child who has no conscience in general. This way of thinking has served to justify the subordination and dependence of women. It is an indoctrination that Nsue Angüe criticizes in this novel. Likewise, she shows how men take control of the word and women become mere listeners, even when it comes to issues that only affect them.

The ailments suffered by women in this novel are also picked up by the author when she has to speak or describe the situation of widows. First of all, it should be noted that thanks to the voice raised by women like Maria Nsue Angüe, the ill-treatment that the woman went through when her husband died in the Fang culture, has changed considerably in recent years, although it must be recognized that it is still going on, but most certainly that rite called *Acus*, to which the woman is subjected, faces the sunset.

The *Acus* is a ceremonial rite that occurs in different African cultures of which there are few written references. In the Fang language, we find two related words, *Acus* and *Ncus*. The first is a ceremonial funeral rite to which the Fang woman is culturally subjected after the death of her husband. It is an obligatory cultural precept for all those who belong to the Fang ethnic group, however, each family decides to perform it or not. As for the second word *Ncus*, it is the name given to the woman once the *Acus* has been performed. In this regard, Nsang Ovono (2018) explains the following.:

In the event that the woman is widowed, it is common for the brother of the deceased to take her as his wife. This is known as levirate marriage. This keeps her in the bosom of the family since, let us not forget, she has been part of the family since the perfection of the marriage with her deceased husband; in this way the loss of the family wealth is avoided (p. 47).



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The traditional practice of this rite has several justifications, but seen from the point of view of human dignity, it is extremely degrading. The Acus ceremony begins as follows:

In the kitchen, the widows or widower were stripped of all hair and cornered in a corner of the kitchen, sitting naked on the floor, where three consecutive days will be isolated from all kinds of life activities, including talking, symbol of accompanying the husband in death. This was the beginning of the Acus ceremony (Nsue Mibuy, 2005, p. 204).

At this moment the woman has her eyes closed and her head bent downward; in this position the widow feels death in flesh and blood. It is also necessary to clarify that nowadays the widow is no longer naked as in ancient times, but rather is dressed in black or purple as a symbol of mourning, and as noted above, the widow can be placed in the kitchen (when the ceremony takes place in a rural setting) or next to the coffin of the deceased with a cloth covering her face (in urban settings). In Ekomo, the harsh conditions that Nnanga goes through when her husband dies are described, but these conditions are not decided by her, but imposed out of respect for the culture. In this novel, this situation is described in these terms:

In the abaha they discuss whether or not I should get up from the floor as Nana has suggested or, on the contrary, stay up to eight days as the torturers, my mistresses, have said. I think about it, about the people, the men and the abaha. A woman's life is always exposed to the decisions of the abaha from the moment she is born until she dies (Nsue Angüe, 1985, p. 188).

The situation of the widow is a recurring theme throughout this novel. What this is meant to achieve is to make women aware so that they can rebel against cultural practices that debase or vilify them. The resistance to comply with cultural traditions that may be considered harmful as the calamity that widows go through in the Fang culture is something that Nsue Angüe captures very well in her novel:

When the village punishes the widow for having touched her husband's corpse to bury him, it is the Fang shepherd who defends her despite his respect for the customs of his ethnic group. At that moment, a new debate arises between Christian and African cosmogony, as Nnanga must choose between defying the tradition of African taboos or disobeying God (Álvarez Méndez, 2010, p. 144.)

In the face of this type of events that occur in the life of this protagonist, it can be affirmed that in this novel there is, without a doubt, a plan of resistance and vindication for the change of cultural patterns that denigrate women. Another fragment of the novel that details the drastic consequences that a woman suffers when she has committed adultery is as follows:

— The sentence remains! - shouts the old man. For the adulteress, fifty sticks in the ass. And - he continues saying while clearing his throat - for the adulterer, two goats, thirty thousand bipkwele and one hundred and fifty sticks. Because the woman is like a child. She has no conscience of happiness. And her guilt, therefore, is less. [...], because she is like the leaves of the trees: she loves according to the direction in which the wind comes to her (Nsue Angüe, 1985, p. 18).



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The conception of women as inferior beings who can be punished like children is clear. Culture cannot be a means to justify certain atrocities, as is the case of female genital mutilation, which, although not practiced in Equatoguinean society, but in other parts of Africa, is a form of physical violence exercised on women's bodies in the name of cultures and traditions. Regardless of the multiple reasons adduced to justify the rite of Acus, it has all the signs of gender violence, because of the multiple psychological and physical injuries that the beatings leave on the body and soul of the victim. However, it is normalized, because the culture allows it, but it is still violence against women, because it is observed that when a man becomes a widower, his head is not shaved and he is not subjected to multiple beatings, which is evidence of the discriminatory treatment that the Fang woman suffers within their culture for being a woman.

In a context where patriarchal ideology is extremely determinant as it is in Equatoguinean society, gender violence is just one more problem faced by women. When African women writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Trinidad Morgades, Buchi Emecheta, María Nsue Angüe, Trifonia Melibea Obono, Anita Hichaicoto Topapori, Fatou Diome, Ken Bugul, Wangari Maathai, Sembène Ousmane, Mariama Bâ, etc., reflect the problems of African women, it is because they want to promote social and political changes of inclusion for African women.

The scenario of Equatoguinean literature changes drastically with the appearance of the novel under study, because it introduces a theme never before presented in the history of Equatoguinean literature, therefore, it has been argued that they are the beginnings of feminist literature in Equatorial Guinea. Therefore, it can be admitted that Nsue Angüe is in fact a feminist woman, as reflected in this novel that can perfectly be considered the first work of Equatoguinean literature that places an unparalleled emphasis on the situation of the Fang woman. For this reason, she deserves great respect for her courage and dedication in the struggle for the emancipation of women. When one reads the novel *Ekomo*, one can glimpse several themes, such as colonialism, the freedom of African peoples, ethnicity, etc. According to some researchers:

Nsue tries to reflect on the cultural reality of his society and, to do so, he focuses on the relationship between life and death, relying on cosmogony as a means of interpreting the world. His proposal raises the conflict between Christianity and traditional African myth. The protagonist, Nnanga, who had assumed the Western Protestant religion accepted by her husband, seems to return to traditional beliefs when he dies. But she finally violates a taboo by deciding to bury him, as she touches his corpse. Latent in all these episodes is the dialectic between tradition and the progress of modernity (Álvarez Méndez, 2010, p. 141).

However, if we analyze this novel from a gender perspective, we clearly see that it is a novel that highlights the pain or suffering of women in Equatoguinean society in general, although the emphasis is on the Fang ethnic group. The woman that Nsue Angüe presents in *Ekomo*, is a real fighter, who after the death of her husband *Ekomo*, continues with her life, and although she must also respect her culture, she decides to be the protagonist of her own destiny. With the novel *Ekomo*, Equatoguinean literature takes on another meaning, not only because it does not focus on attacking colonialism, although it describes some of its impacts on African peoples, but also because unlike all the writers who had preceded him, Nsue Angüe bets on a narrative focused on women. It is an unusual work that emerges, as



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mentioned above, at a time when Equatoguinean literature has only male writers as referents.

Nsue Angüe's incursion into Equatoguinean literature introduces women as a subject to be studied because of the difficulties they face in their culture. This is revealed in *Nnanga*, an unusual woman who challenges the same culture at a time when the Fang tradition was even more patriarchal. This is precisely why the novel *Ekomo* is plausible in every way. Nsue Angüe's message in this work is for the woman to stop being a mere spectator of her life and become the protagonist of her life, to be able to choose her life over anything else. In fact, when the shepherd goes to look for *Nnanga* in her village after the death of her husband, he does not raise her up, but gives her the choice of continuing the yoke of tradition or saving her life and rising up.

In sum, *Nnanga* from her position as a woman, African and Equatoguinean, opens the door in her narrative to fundamental questions from within and outside her community. She reveals the impossibility of claiming a voice for Africa without including women in it, as well as the search for a community that retains its union with the past and adapts to the structures of a modern and democratic state to foster a balanced development and hinder new forms of oppression (Beatriz Celaya, 2011, p. 55).

In this sense, it should be pointed out that it is a novel that vindicates the emancipation of Equatoguinean women in the face of the veteropatriarchal culture that oppresses them, relegating them to the private sphere. There are clear intentions to address an issue that concerns the author and that she considers important. The peculiarity of this work lies in its novel theme, never recorded in Equatoguinean literature. In addition, it is a great fundamental contribution in Afro-Hispanic literature.

#### 4. Methodology

In accordance with the problem statement of this article, the research methodology is descriptive. That is, we are dealing with a descriptive methodological design. In this type of research, the researcher focuses on the study of a specific topic that affects a particular group, with the intention of analyzing its nature in order to better understand it. In other words, in research with the descriptive method, the researcher does not want to reach great generalizations, but describes or explains a certain phenomenon such as the pedagogical dimension of the feminist principles of the novel *Ekomo* in Equatoguinean literature in order to better understand it; or in its case, to generate new knowledge that will help future research to investigate aspects that were not taken into account in other research with a similar approach.

Despite the statistical data we provide in this research, it is not a quantitative methodology, but a qualitative one. These are partial data that we cannot avoid due to the objectives of this research and the absence of official data that would better clarify the understanding of our object of study. The population on which this research has been conducted is essentially from the city of Bata and the representative sample will consist of 402 citizens of both sexes, aged 18 to 30 years. The selected sample is representative because the city of Bata is the most populated city in Equatorial Guinea and is very cosmopolitan. In addition, the selected age groups constitute the school and working population of Equatorial Guinea. In this sense, the results of this sample can be generalized to the entire population. In any case, detailed



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information on the characteristics of the sample used can be found in the subsection dedicated to the case study of polygamy in the city of Bata.

## 5. Analysis and discussion of the results

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to generate the data obtained from the field research. For data collection, the survey technique was used, while the instrument consisted of a questionnaire made up of five closed questions of simple selection to determine whether the pedagogical content of the novel Ekomo serves to sensitize citizens on the issue of women's emancipation and respect for their rights, such as the right to education and other civil and political liberties. We consider this instrument to be valid and reliable because of the data it provides on content. The questions of the questionnaire and the results of these are as follows:

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	205	51.0	51.0	100.0
	No	197	49.0	49.0	49.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 1. Have you read the novel Ekomo from Equatoguinean literature?

Interpretation: With a total of 402 respondents, 51.0% have read the novel Ekomo, while the other respondents, 49.0% have not read this novel.

Analysis: The relevant result of this question is that most of the citizens surveyed according to the characteristics of the selected sample have read the novel Ekomo. First, because it is a novel that has been made known to the population about its existence, and because some professors of Equatoguinean literature often recommend it as a fundamental reading to pass the subject. As a result, the novel has been so widely disseminated that when it is talked about, most people have some notion of it. Above all, the writer is recognized, because it is often repeated in class that she is the first Equatoguinean woman to write a novel. Despite the considerable number of citizens who have not had access to the reading of this novel, it is mainly due to the scarcity of copies of the book, because it should be noted that, at the Bata level, only the Spanish Cultural Center of Bata has these books.

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	235	58.0	58.0	100.0
	No	167	42.0	42.0	58.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Can the content of the novel Ekomo be considered as educational for the Equatoguinean society?



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Interpretation: For 58.0%, the novel Ekomo has an educational dimension for the Equatoguinean society, while 42.0% think the opposite.

Analysis: In this question, it is correct to note that the majority of respondents consider that the content of this novel is educational for the Equatoguinean society. In the first place, it is fundamentally due to the idea that has been developed throughout this article, and that is that the novel Ekomo addresses a theme linked to the recognition of women's rights, that is, it seeks a socio-cultural change in terms of gender relations. Taking into account the patriarchal structure of this society where women have been gradually conquering their rights, the novel Ekomo exalts the courage of women and recognizes the enormous challenges that the future holds for them. Therefore, teaching the importance of this novel is crucial if we want to change the androcentric mentality of Equatoguinean society.

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	233	79.9	79.9	79.9
	No	169	20.1	20.1	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Do you think that the novel Ekomo has inspired other women to dedicate themselves to literature and write about the same subject matter?

Interpretation: Out of a total of 402 respondents, 79.9% recognized that the novel in question has inspired other Equatoguinean women writers to write on the same subject. On the other hand, 20.1% said that they did not consider this novel relevant enough to motivate other writers.

Analysis: Taking into account the data shown in the table above, a large majority of respondents consider that the novel Ekomo is the one that inspired subsequent women writers to dedicate themselves to literature, many of them mentioned in this research and who write about themes that circumscribe women, providing a different vision of society and culture with respect to women in Equatoguinean literature. The novel Ekomo marks a before and after in Equatoguinean literature, still very little studied in Equatorial Guinea and in the range of what is called Hispano-Afriacan or Hispanic literature. At present there is a plethora of Equatoguinean women writers who focus on different genres, although it must be recognized that the genre par excellence is the novel. Very few works in African literature have been able to detail the asymmetrical situation of African women in relation to men.

		Frequency	Percentage	Porcentaje válido	Porcentaje acumulado
Valid	Yes	387	96.0	96.0	96.0
	No	15	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	



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Table 4. Do you think Ekomo can be categorized as a feminist novel within Equatoguinean literature?

Interpretation: According to the respondents, 96.0% consider this novel as feminist, followed by 4.0% who do not find reasons for this work to be considered feminist.

Analysis: The result is imposed in this question, because apart from the fact that it is inexorably linked to one of the objectives of this article, it confirms the same thesis that is defended because the majority of respondents consider this novel as feminist within the Equatoguinean literature. This question is linked to the previous one, as it has been the inspiration for several women writers to offer a theme that focuses their interest in making visible the problems that affect women, something that had never been presented by their peers, as they offered themes where the protagonism was given to men.

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	392	98.0	98.0	98.0
	No	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Is it important to promote the reading of the novel Ekomo in the Secondary and Baccalaureate education of the Equatoguinean educational system?

Interpretation: Of the 402 respondents, 98.0% said that the reading of this novel should be encouraged in secondary and high school education in the Equatoguinean educational system. At the antipodes of this thought, 10.0% consider that it is not necessary to read this work.

Analysis: The results of this question corroborate some of our arguments presented in this thesis. In a novel within the Equatoguinean literature whose reading should be necessary for those who attend Secondary and Baccalaureate. The pedagogical foundation of this novel, as well as the nature of the author herself, allows it to be made known to students so that they learn from it and are able to draw their conclusions on the various issues addressed in this novel, some of them analyzed throughout this article.

## 6. Conclusions

Equatoguinean literature is represented by women authors who are still invisible due to the limited diffusion of their works. In fact, until recently, the novel Ekomo did not arouse the interest of researchers. Precisely, the pedagogical dimension of this novel has allowed the appearance of several researches focused on the study of this unusual work within the Equatoguinean or Afro-Hispanic literature, thus becoming the first novel by an African author in Spanish. From the feminist perspective in which the socio-educational component of this work is analyzed, there is a great interest on the part of the author in presenting a woman, in this case, Nnanga who is the protagonist, strong, intelligent and beautiful, who tries to break the patriarchal yoke in which women find themselves within their culture. It is a novel that can be categorized as feminist because it describes the inequalities and injustice committed against women. Inequalities that are observed in aspects such as the power of speech. When men speak, women keep silent. For this reason, the thesis of the



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pedagogical component of this novel has been defended within the Equatoguinean literature because it exhorts to change the parameters of inequality rooted in the society in which the work is developed.

The socio-educational character of this work promotes the change of cultural paradigms within the Equatoguinean society. This novel is intended not only to highlight the different socio-cultural problems faced by African Fang women in Equatoguinean society, but also to promote the implementation of egalitarian policies such as access to education for girls, the elimination of arranged marriages and any kind of harmful cultural practices against women. Although the novel *Ekomo* is practically set at the end of the colonial period, when Equatorial Guinea is about to become independent from Spain, it must be said that the situation of women at that time has not changed much, however, we must recognize that thanks to women like Maria Nsue Angüe, many things have changed. Today we can see that women feel more self-confident and are committed to their own and their children's education.

Throughout this article, we wanted to make it clear that it is not a text commentary of this novel, but rather to highlight the feminist thinking and socio-educational content that exists in this work, thus demonstrating that it is the precedent of the struggle for the rights of Equatoguinean women. Within Equatoguinean literature, which is mostly represented by men, we can find a novel that focuses on presenting the odyssey that women go through within the Fang culture, and advocates for them to be given their rightful place.

Before the publication of this novel, it was unheard of to think that a woman could dedicate herself to literature and even more so to write a book, in this case, a novel. In fact, it is not surprising that the subject matter of this novel highlights the problems that vilify women in the Fang patriarchal system, such as dowry, widowhood, polygamy, and so on. All these problems still persist, but thanks to the courage of Nsue Angüe, she managed to make them visible in order to put an end to these obstacles. Nsue Angüe's imprint on Equatoguinean feminist literature has helped other generations, such as that of Trifonia Melibea Obono, to continue vindicating women's rights in Equatoguinean society. That is to say, the thematic initiated by her has influenced other generations to continue with the same fight, always oriented to obtain the rights and freedoms for women in basic things like the right to education.

In general terms, the above allows us to say that more lines of research should be developed on this novel, but, above all, to reflect on the role that women like Nsue Angüe have left in the history of Equatoguinean literature. Her legacy is an impulse for other women who want to follow the same theme initiated by this great writer. In this order of ideas, in this novel it is convenient to recognize that history is a little fair in the recognition of all those Equatoguinean women writers who are forgotten and who do not appear in the different textbooks used in the Equatoguinean educational system. Therefore, we believe that a good line of research could also be to really investigate what is the diffusion of the literary production of Equatoguinean women writers within the educational system of this country, to see if the student body really knows or has read at least one novel written by an Equatoguinean woman. *Ekomo* cements the feminist novel in Equatorial Guinea through literature to detoxify the education fostered by the patriarchal system that constitutes a brake on the development of women's skills.



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