The *Adulteresses* Were Reformers: The Perception and Position of Women in the Religious Fight of Fernando Poo, 1843–1900

Jean Luc Enyegue, S.J.

The end of the Francisco Franco (1892–1975) regime in 1975 was marked by public protests against court decisions on adultery all over Spain. On October 10, 1976, the newspaper *El país* reported on a case in Zaragoza.¹ Activists Anita Bennett and Jill Nichols reported another case in 1977, which led to one of the largest women's demonstrations in Spain's history. Women took over the streets in cities such as Madrid, Zaragoza, Mallorca, and Barcelona to ask for equal rights and emancipation. Their placards read: "We are all adulteresses."² Almost a century earlier, Fernando Poo was still a Spanish possession. In 1890, Maria Smith, a Nigerian Protestant missionary, and other Protestant mothers led a protest against the political and religious establishment of Fernando Poo.³ The Spanish governor had refused to give Smith permission to build a school for girls. Fr. Emengol Coll, the Catholic apostolic prefect, supported the governor's decision on the grounds that such a school would work against Spain's national interests.⁴ Most of these women were tried, severely punished, and called "adulteresses."

The collusion between colonization and evangelization in Fernando Poo was especially harsh on women. Four years after Smith and the mothers' protest, in the Claretian mission of Fernando Poo, a woman was murdered. According to historian Jacint Creus, who is my main source on the incident, Father Andreu Puig-gros and Brother Antonio Artieda had ordered this "bad woman" to be beaten all night, with hands and feet tied, because of her "immorality." She was accused of inciting the children of her Protestant school to

1 "Absuelta una presunta adúltera en Zaragoza," *El país*, October 10, 1976; http://elpais.com/diario/1976/10/10/ultima/213750002_850215.html (accessed June 25, 2017).

2 Anita Bennett and Jill Nichols, "Women's Movement in Spain," *Off Our Backs* 7 (October 1977): 10.

3 Today, Fernando Poo is part of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

4 ULTRAMAR, 5310, Expediente (EXP in the archives and in this text), Box 14, nos. 1–9, October 4, 1890. No biographical information is available on Maria Smith and many other missionaries mentioned in this essay.

“debauchery,” and of having sexual intercourse with her young pupils. None of the pupils involved in the intercourse was punished; but each of them was asked to give their schoolmistress fifty lashes, and the abuse continued throughout the entire night.⁵ Father Puig-gros and Brother Artieda were later arrested because of the incident, but Coll, as head of the Catholic Church in Fernando Poo, paid a fee to the leaders of the Bengal ethnic group to which the woman belonged and thus secured their release. Fernandian rulers themselves showed little concern for a girl whom they considered immoral, rebellious, and a subversive slave.⁶ However, the trial was the subject of a parliamentary debate in Madrid on May 29, 1895.⁷

Creus claims to have consulted the Claretians' archives for the period between 1894 and 1902. But this woman, Ndjuke as he names her, remained nameless in those archives. The Claretians instead portrayed her as “a girl, a woman [...] ‘Perverted,’ ‘repudiated,’ ‘pervertisseuse’ [literally a perverted-maker or spoiler], ‘scandalous,’ ‘unfaithful,’ ‘corrupt,’ ‘ferocious,’ ‘dishonest,’ ‘bitch,’ ‘prostitute.’”⁸ This essay will show that these so-called prostitutes or adulteresses were reformers in both the religious and political sense. On the one hand, they claimed their distinctive reformed faith as the reason for their fight for their civic and religious rights, and against a project of Catholic religious monopoly. On the other hand, they skillfully exploited loopholes in the colonial law to resist male dominance and successfully achieved substantial social reforms. What the archives of the Claretians say about Ndjuke indicates that the representation of women resisting male power in nineteenth-century Spain and its colonies was strikingly sexual, and demonizing.⁹ In Fernando Poo, the perception of women by religious males during the project of Catholicization gradually led to the exclusion of women from public space, and Ndjuke's murder was simply the highest point of a conflict that started with the arrival of the first Spanish expedition to the island in 1843.

5 Creus wrote his dissertation on Catholic missions in Fernando Poo and its connection to colonialism. He published it in 1998. See: Jacint Creus, *Action missionnaire en Guinée Equatoriale 1858–1910: Perplexités et naïvetés à l'aube de la colonisation* (Paris: Université Paris VII, 1998).

6 Ibid., 529. “La femme ne leur importait que très peu; il s'agissait d'une esclave aux mœurs dissolues et rebelles à son propre chef Manuel Ukambala, dont on ne faisait aucun cas.”

7 Ibid., 525ff.

8 Ibid., 575.

9 Ndjuke is the name Jacint Creus used. Few details are available about her.

Context of Women's Resistance to Missionaries in Fernando Poo

There is a long history of African women resisting Christian missionaries and suffering severe punishments for their resistance. In seventeenth-century Ethiopia, for example, comparative linguist Wendy L. Belcher has shown that women presented the fiercest opposition to the Counter-Reformation led by the Jesuits. In Jesuit reports, these "sisters" were portrayed as "demons."¹⁰ In the Kongo Kingdom, historian Richard Gray alludes to the setback the Capuchins faced from educated women.¹¹ In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Kimpa Vita (1684–1706) led the Antonian Movement in its opposition to the Capuchins and paid for it with her own life.¹² Likewise, in Fernando, during the nineteenth-century Spanish project of Catholicization, the Jesuits and the Claretians also faced opposition from Protestant women in a struggle that anticipated the women's march in the streets of post-Franco Spain. Initially converted by Baptist and Methodist missionaries, and mothers of Fernandian children, these women were the "heretics" the Jesuit archives left nameless but which their missionaries feared. They were the mothers whose children, including girls, the Jesuits struggled to bring to their school. And once the Jesuits left Fernando Poo, the women and the girls they educated became the opposition leaders against the Claretians in their efforts to Catholicize Fernando Poo. Key to their success, as we will see, was their high literacy rates and their mastery of modern Spanish law.

The Spanish colonial project in Fernando Poo was framed as an attempt to "Hispanize and Catholicize."¹³ To attain this goal, the court of Queen Isabella II (r.1833–68) organized and sponsored three Catholic missions and made the education of children in that Spanish possession a priority. Three centuries

- 10 Wendy Laura Belcher, "Sisters Debating the Jesuits: The Role of African Women in Defeating Portuguese Proto-colonialism in Seventeenth-Century Abyssinia," *Northeast African Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 121–66.
- 11 Richard Gray, "A Kongo Princess, the Kongo Ambassadors and the Papacy," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29 (May 1999): 140–54, here 140. Quoting Mateo de Anguiano, 365–69.
- 12 Kimpa Vita was a sixteenth-century Congolese prophetess who started a religious movement aimed at reinterpreting Christianity and its key characters, including Jesus Christ, as of Congolese origin. She faced a trial in Kongo and was executed in 1706, at the age of twenty-two. See John K. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 13 Antonio Zarandona, "Proyecto de una misión a las islas españolas del Golfo de Guinea: Presentado en la Dirección de Ultramar Por A–Z, El 4 de Mayo de 1857," AHA. C 458, no. 8570009.

before, from 1645 to 1654,¹⁴ Fernando Poo had received its first Christian mission when the Capuchins and the Discalced Carmelites attempted to evangelize in the region.¹⁵ This mission was part of numerous Catholic expeditions launched from Portugal, France, and Rome to save the souls of the large area from Sierra Leone to the Kingdom of Kongo, with São Tomé as the center of this Catholic project.¹⁶ The Carmelites' expedition also coincided with a new push from the Propaganda Fide to implement the Counter-Reformation in the Kongo.¹⁷ As far as women were concerned, on June 7, 1607, Jean de Brétigny (1556–1634), founder of many Carmelite communities in France, wrote to a Kongolese diplomatic delegation visiting the Spanish court: "God's providence," de Brétigny said, "has wished to send these Discalced Carmelite nuns in order to instruct 'little girls' [*las donzellas*]." Doing so, he believed, was "the best way to bring them to know and to love as their husband Jesus Christ and to offer him their virginity and service."¹⁸

However, there was a negative side to de Brétigny's plan in that it played on the dominant ideology concerning women's role in society in modern Europe, which nineteenth-century historiography later coined as "domesticity." In Spain, for instance, this ideology assessed the "Spanishness" of men according to their virility and nobility. Women's characters, in contrast, were portrayed as "*the opposite sex*, as a complement that was *different*."¹⁹ This ideology was also reinforced by the contradictions of Spanish modernity. In Spain, opponents of modernity feared that the erosion of the difference between men and women would destroy the foundation of society. Catholic anti-modernists embraced

14 Dolores Garcías Cantús, *Fernando Poo: Una aventura colonial española en la África occidental; 1778–1900* (Barcelona: Ceibas, 2006), 43–44.

15 According to historian Keith J. Egan, the Carmelites began as a group of lay hermits on Mount Carmel around 1200. They became a mendicant order by 1247, were joined by a Second Order of women in 1452, contributed through Teresa of Jesus (1515–82) and John of the Cross (1542–91) classical texts to the Western mystical tradition, became two separate orders with the creation of the Discalced Carmelite Order in 1593, and gave the church one of its most popular women saints ever in Thérèse of Lisieux (d.1897); see Keith J. Egan, "*Historia del Carmelo Español, Vol II–IV*, by Balbino Velasco Bayón," *Catholic Historical Review* 81 (October 1995): 611–13.

16 Cf. Roger Onomo Etaba, *Histoire de l'Eglise catholique du Cameroun, de Grégoire XV à Jean-Paul II (1831–1991)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007).

17 Richard Gray, "The Kongo Kingdom and the Papacy: A Unique Conclave of Christianity in the Heart of 17th-Century Africa," *History Today* 47 (1997): 44–49.

18 Gray, "Kongo Princess," 151.

19 Susan Kirkpatrick, "Gender and Modernist Discourse: Emilia Pardo Barzán's *Dulce Dueño*," in *Modernism and Its Margins*, ed. Anthony L. Geist and José Monleón (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 117–39, here 118.

the *fin de siècle* literature's opposition to women. According to comparative linguist Susan Kirkpatrick, that literature reduced women to sinfulness, sensuality, witchcraft, and paganism.²⁰ Yet, on the other hand, de Brétigny also anticipated what would later become known in mission theory as "Women working for women."²¹ Both Catholic and Protestants missionaries addressed women's issues and wanted women to empower others in Fernando Poo.

By the time the Spanish Catholics returned to Fernando Poo in 1856, two things had become clear to them: Annobón, the island where the Carmelites had missioned in the seventeenth century, was still a predominantly Catholic island. And the Baptists and the Methodists had filled the vacuum the Catholic missionaries had left unattended. The success of Protestants in Fernando Poo, before the arrival of the Jesuits, is well documented. The diaries of Rev. Samuel Crowther (1807–91), the first African Anglican bishop, and his companion during the First Niger Expedition of 1841, Rev. James F. Schön, mention the success of the work Methodist and Baptist missionaries were doing in Fernando Poo. On October 28, 1841, Crowther wrote: "Many persons brought their children, to have their names written down, in order to [be] baptized. Some adults also applied for baptism."²² On October 31, 1841, Schön wrote in his journal: "There is a school here, of about forty children of the settlers, kept in the house of the Schoolmaster, a native of Cape Coast."²³ On the same day, Schön is said to have baptized forty-four children; on November 7, he baptized thirty more. Among those baptized "was a young woman, a native of the Island, living with a woman settler."²⁴

The central ideas concerning the incoming Catholic enterprise in Fernando Poo in the nineteenth century were defined by Jerónimo Mariano Usera y Alarcón (1810–91). These ideas were pursued and implemented by three different Catholic missions: the expedition of Miguel Martínez Sanz (1856–57), the Jesuits (1858–72), and the Claretian fathers whom the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception accompanied from 1883. Usera y Alarcón was a secular cleric. Having spent some time catechizing two young black men in his parish of Chamberi, Madrid, he decided to launch a more ambitious project of

20 Ibid., 119.

21 Isabela Cabral Feliz de Souza, "The Educational Background of Women Working for Women in Rio de Janeiro," *Convergence* 31 (1998): 30–37.

22 Samuel Crowther and James F. Schön, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther Who, with the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1842), 340.

23 Ibid., 343–44.

24 Ibid., 341.

evangelization in their place of origin, Fernando Poo.²⁵ He arrived in Fernando Poo in 1845,²⁶ eventually leaving for Cuba where he became bishop and founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Love. Pope John Paul II (r.1978–2005) beatified him in June 1999.

Usara y Alarcón understood the Catholic mission in Fernando Poo in the mark of colonial assimilation and in continuity with slavery. In his memoir, he described his project as a civilized mission that required few expenses and was supposed to “submit people through charity.” The missionaries would hold the Bible in one hand and the cross in the other to appease indigenous people in the name of civilization.²⁷ This ideology was also supported by a racial component. The abolition of slavery, Usara y Alarcón believed, had deprived the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean of cheap labor. And since it had been proven that white men could not work effectively in such climatic conditions, it was necessary to keep the blacks as slaves.²⁸

Usara y Alarcón's *Memoirs of Fernando Poo* refers to women solely while dealing with their sexual behavior. Women appear as victims of the institution of polygamy, which, for most Europeans, often connoted women's enslavement. He also shows that, in case of adultery, women were often more severely punished than men.²⁹ In its seventeenth title, the Castilian law compendium of 1256, *Las siete partidas*,³⁰ already described adultery as “one of the greatest faults which men can commit [and] from which not only injury, but also dishonor, arises.”³¹ Compared with *Las siete partidas*, the punishments for women found guilty of committing adultery, as feminist historian Marcel Bernos has shown, had become even more severe by the nineteenth century. One reason Bernos gives is that the prospect of a child born of an

25 San Cristóbal de la Habana o Zamora, “Jerónimo Mariano Usara Y Alarcón (1810–1891): Sacerdote y fundador de la congregación de las Hermanas del Amor de Dios; Positio sobre las virtudes y fama de santidad” (Congregación de las Causas de los Santos, 1995), i.

26 Claretianos Misioneros, ed., *Cien años de evangelización en Guinea Ecuatorial, 1883–1983* (Barcelona: Claret, 1983), 13.

27 Jerónimo M. Usara y Alarcón, *Memoria de la Isla de Fernando Poo* (Madrid: T. Aguado, 1848), 68.

28 Ibid., 77.

29 Ibid., 16.

30 The literal translation would be “Seven Games,” but this does not give full account of the meaning. English commentary on this law compendium retained its Spanish title.

31 Robert I. Burns, ed., *Las siete partidas: The Dead, the Criminal, and the Marginalized* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 5:1411. A man accused and convicted by a judge of having committed adultery faced the death penalty. A woman found in the same situation, in contrast, was publicly scourged, sent to a convent, and deprived of her dowry.

adulterous relationship endangered peaceful succession in families and had greater potential of social conflict.³² Generally speaking, Bernos believes that the nineteenth century had simply made things worse for women's standing in society.³³

Usery y Alarcón's project had a lasting impact on successive Spanish missions in Fernando Poo. As Martínez Sanz was preparing for his missionary expedition to Fernando Poo, he used Usery y Alarcón's memoirs as his main source of information about the Fernandians.³⁴ He also made sure that the forty members of his mission had knowledge of those memoirs.³⁵ As such, Martínez's expedition did not depart from Usery y Alarcón's worldview. He described the Fernandian women as "slaves" of their husbands. His report also identified polygamy as a major obstacle for the success of any Christian mission in Fernando Poo.³⁶ On the other hand, women were also part of Martínez's expedition both as wives and missionaries.³⁷ For among the forty members who left Valencia and traveled to Fernando Poo in 1856, five of them were priests; two were laywomen, the wife and mother of the carpenter; and twelve nuns.³⁸ These women had been tasked with educating the girls and taking care of the sick.³⁹ Martínez's own assessment of the mission, however, was that, with the exception of the carpenters, nobody else was to do anything substantial in Fernando Poo, not even the nuns, who were unable to educate the girls because they did not know the language.⁴⁰ The question now was whether the arrival of the Jesuits with their missionary experience would succeed where Martínez and his friends had failed.

In June 1856, a royal decree founded the College of Loyola and Overseas Missions and entrusted the mission of Fernando Poo to the Society of Jesus.⁴¹

32 Marcel Bernos, *Femmes et gens d'Église dans la France classique, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2003), 256.

33 Ibid., 340.

34 Miguel Martínez y Sanz, *Breves apuntes de la misión de Fernando Poo en el Golfo de Guinea* (Madrid: Imprenta de Iñigo Reneses, 1859), 14.

35 Ibid., 92.

36 Ibid., 48.

37 He was the founder of a women's congregation, the Servants of Mary (Siervas de María).

38 But why would a man go to Fernando Poo not only with his wife but also his elderly mother? It was not a Catholic practice to have laymen missionaries going to mission accompanied by their wife. A possible reason is that some of these missionaries were paying their debt; they went to Fernando Poo as a punishment, as Sanz had suggested early in his text.

39 Martínez y Sanz, *Breves apuntes de la Misión de Fernando Poo*, 93.

40 Ibid., 102.

41 See my previous work on this mission: Jean Luc Enyegue, "The Jesuits in Fernando Po, 1858–1872: An Incomplete Mission," in *Jesuits Survival and Restoration: A Global History*, ed. Robert A. Maryks and Jonathan Wright (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 466–86.

Fr. Antonio Zarandona (1804–84), procurator of the Jesuit missions in the court of Queen Isabella II, elaborated upon the mission project on May 4, 1857.⁴² Born in Bilbao in 1804, he joined the Society at age twenty-four and did his regency in the Colegio de Nobles de Madrid (1831–33). He was ordained priest in 1834 in Madrid. The catalog of 1850 shows him as socius of Provincial Antonio Murrey, cumulatively serving as procurator for overseas missions. He held that function until 1882, two years before his death.⁴³

Zarandona is the author of a book, *La historia de la Compañía de Jesús: Desde su extinción hasta su restauración* (The history of the Society of Jesus from its suppression to its restoration), the only edition of which was published under the direction of Ricardo Cappa (1800–97) in 1890.⁴⁴ In the book, Zarandona gives a clear indication of his views on Protestants. The hatred of Sebastião Carvalho, marquis of Pombal (1699–1782), for the church and the Society, Zarandona argues, started from his time in Lutheran Germany. As a young diplomat there, Carvalho became familiar with the “doctrines of the century.”⁴⁵ Zarandona also accused Protestants, along with Jansenists and the philosophers, of disseminating Carvalho’s pamphlets against the Jesuits.⁴⁶

In the project Zarandona elaborated for Fernando Poo, he specifically described the scope of the Jesuit mission as being to “Hispanize and Catholicize” mostly by educating “young boys” and eventually the adults.⁴⁷ The exclusive mention of the “boys” in his project might lead one to think that Zarandona and the Jesuits were less concerned about the situation of girls and women. The truth, however, is that the Jesuits in Fernando Poo were willing to extend their ministry to the girls, but they faced strong opposition from Fernandian mothers. Moreover, in their own words, they lacked the skills and personnel to deal with what they called “the other sex.”

Fr. José Irisarri (1811–68) was appointed head of the mission. In his *Memorias*, Irisarri describes how Fernandian girls were inseparable from their mothers,

42 Antonio Zarandona, “Proyecto de una misión a las islas españolas del Golfo de Guinea: Presentado en la Dirección de Ultramar Por A–Z, El 4 de Mayo de 1857,” Jesuit Archives in Alcalá de Henares (AHA). C 458, no. 8570009.

43 For this account, I consulted the Jesuit catalogs of the Spanish province in Alcalá de Henares, from the restoration to 1900.

44 Antonio Zarandona, *Historia de la extinción y restablecimiento de la Compañía de Jesús*, ed. Ricardo Cappa, 3 vols. (Madrid: Luis Aguado, 1890), vol. 3.

45 Ibid., 3:5.

46 Ibid., 3:26.

47 Zarandona, “Proyecto de una misión a las islas españolas del Golfo de Guinea: Presentado en la Dirección de Ultramar Por A–Z, El 4 de Mayo de 1857.”

which rendered their attempt to educate these girls almost impossible.⁴⁸ Married men would also approach the fathers to complain about their wives' infidelities. Women, for their part, would complain about the indiscipline of the girls they were supposed to educate.⁴⁹ There is even a case of a catechumen widow woman. She had had two husbands and was about to marry a third man who, this time, was Catholic.⁵⁰

The correspondence between Irísarri and his provincial portrays a permanent concern about the fate of young girls and the challenges the Jesuits faced to address issues related to women.⁵¹ A letter from the provincial of Toledo to Irísarri on July 13, 1865 made comments about the movements of the Jesuit personnel in Corisco, which was one of the islands included in the Fernando Poo mission. The provincial expressed his desire to have some "hermanas" (sisters) assisting in Corisco, as the fathers and sisters of the Holy Ghost (Spiritains) in Gabon did. Those sisters would take care of the education of children of the other sex (*otro sexo*). But the provincial was also reluctant to have sisters working with Jesuit missionaries because he wanted "to remain faithful to the Jesuit tradition."⁵²

In another letter, on September 11, 1865, the provincial emphasized the necessity of providing Christian education to girls. That kind of work would form these girls on tasks "proper for their sex." A Catholic woman, with proper manners and the ability to speak both English and Spanish was needed to carry out this task. The aim in forming these girls was to make them capable women, able to rule their home.⁵³ As good mothers, they would breastfeed their children with the Catholic faith, so as to form a Catholic generation.⁵⁴ But once again, the Jesuit tradition was perceived as an impediment.⁵⁵

The reasoning of the Jesuits in Fernando Poo about women's ministries was that Jesuits' work with and for women seemed contrary to their tradition.

48 José Irísarri, *Misión de Fernando Poo, 1859* (Barcelona: Ceibas, 1998). Especially, in his "Segunda memoria," December 19, 1860. Ref. AGA. A–G. C 780. E. 10.

49 Miquel Vilaró i Güell, *El legado de los jesuitas en Guinea* (Barcelona: Ceibas, 2010), 73.

50 Ibid., 77.

51 These letters belonged to the Jesuit province of Toledo and are now being transferred to the AHA. Many of the letters are responses of the provincial of Toledo to Fr. Irísarri.

52 Archivo Provincial de Toledo, in AHA, C-67.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 "Solo así es como se podría realizar un proyecto de tanta importancia; pues el pensar en monjas lo mira de mal ojo San Ignacio; y el admitirlas con los chicos *nec nominetur*; y el no enseñarles las labores propias de su sexo a la vez que se las instruye en la religión, es cosa de todo punto indispensable *ut fructus noster maneat*."

That interpretation seems very conservative. It is true that the Jesuits, unlike other Catholic missionary orders such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans, the Spiritains or the Claretians, did not have a female branch that could have accompanied them in mission.⁵⁶ Some historians have explained Ignatius of Loyola's (c.1491–1556) reluctance concerning women's admittance to his order and Jesuits' ministries to them as proof of a misogynistic worldview.⁵⁷ And to support this position, there is much evidence of the worldview of early modern Europe on women, which we can find in Ignatius's and other early Jesuits' writings. Women often appeared as weak, less mobile, and more fragile.⁵⁸ The evil spirit in the Spiritual Exercises "conducts himself as a woman," a "weakling before a show of strength, and a tyrant if he has his will."⁵⁹ However, an overlooked historical fact is that Ignatius actually admitted women to make their vows, although these women were forced out almost immediately. According to theologian Lisa Fullam, if Ignatius had come to see "the role of women as incompatible with, even contradictory to, the vocation of a member of the Society of Jesus," it was because Ignatius "believed that women of this time were incapable of promising the kind of availability for mission that lies at the heart of Jesuit calling."⁶⁰

As far as the practice in Fernando Poo was concerned, the Jesuits were able to baptize some girls. Their school also received Protestant children from countries such as Sierra Leone, Calabar, Lagos, and the Kongo.⁶¹ Because of their conservative interpretation of Ignatius's decision not to admit women to the order, the Jesuits in Fernando Poo, unlike the Spiritain fathers in Gabon, lacked

-
- 56 The Ursulines Sisters were among the first to join the mission field with the Jesuits. On the Ursulines and gender in mission, see Alanna Catherine DeNapoli Morris, "Female Missionaries in The Jesuit Relations: A Study of the Creators of the Ursulines Seminary in Quebec" (MTS, Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 2005); Querciolo Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474–1540)* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007); Mazzonis, "The Impact of Renaissance Gender-Related Notions on the Female Experience of the Sacred: The Case of Angela Merici's Ursulines," in *Gender, Catholicism, and Spirituality* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 51–67.
- 57 Jean Lacouture, *Jesuits: A Multibiography* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), 135.
- 58 Alanna Catherine DeNapoli Morris, "Female Missionaries in the Jesuit Relations: A Study of the Creators of the Ursulines Seminary in Quebec" (MTS thesis, Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 2005).
- 59 Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Vintage, 2000), no. 325.
- 60 Lisa Fullam, *Juana, S.J.: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, 1999), 4.
- 61 Vilaró i Güell, *El legado de los Jesuitas en Guinea*, 108, 146.

the female personnel they needed and never overcame the challenges girls and women posed to them. Thus it is no surprise that their desire to educate Fernandian girls never came to completion. Moreover, religious orders were suppressed both in Spain and overseas following the Spanish liberal revolution of 1868. Without resources for the mission, disappointed by the scarce results they harvested, and facing opposition from the natives with the support of Baptist and Methodist missionaries,⁶² the Jesuits left Fernando Poo in 1872. They never returned,⁶³ despite repeated requests from the colonial authorities.⁶⁴

Fernandian Protestants represented a major obstacle for the success of the Jesuit mission in Fernando Poo.⁶⁵ In a letter to Manuel Lozano, overseas minister, in 1864, Zarandona lamented the refusal of Fernandian families to send their children to the missionary school of Saint Isabel. These women believed that their children might be forced to convert to Catholicism. In response to that reluctance, the colonial government proposed constructing a public school for these "Spanish subjects born in error [i.e., Protestants]." Zarandona opposed this project, triggering a crisis that continued until the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1872.⁶⁶ Similarly, in his response to the government justifying the refusal of the Jesuits to return to Fernando Poo, and the reasons why their mission there had failed, Zarandona stressed the fact that the heresy had "infested" the local population, rendering their work with children ineffective.

The departure of the Jesuits from Fernando Poo was just another step in the Catholic enterprise in Fernando Poo. As the Claretians took over the mission in 1883,⁶⁷ the Protestants' opposition, which had remained nameless, faceless, and genderless, now had names and female leaders whose impact definitively

62 Antonio Zarandona, *A Manuel Lozano, Ministro de Ultramar*, November 8, 1864. Box 58, no. 5640004: "La cuestión de la escuela civil se suscitó con motivo de que las familias de Santa Isabel, capital de la Isla, rehusaban mandar sus hijos a la escuela de los misioneros, temiendo que éstos los indujeran a abrazar la religión católica abjurando la secta metodista, que en aquella capital es la dominante; y a consecuencia de este retraimiento de los naturales, la autoridad de la Isla propuso al gobierno la creación de la referida escuela, por no dejar sin medio de educación a unos niños que si bien han nacido en el seno del error, son súbditos de España."

63 Ministro de Ultramar, *Al Gobernador de Fernando Poo*, January 1, 1871. Box 58, no. 8710003.

64 *Correspondencia del 01 de abril de 1878*. Box 58, no. 8780006; *Correspondencia del 7 de abril de 1879*. Ch. 58, no. 8790006; and *A.Z. al Ministro de Ultramar*, April 16, 1879. Box 58, no. 8920007.

65 Enyegue, "Jesuits in Fernando Poo."

66 Antonio Zarandona, "Al Excmo. Sr. D. Manuel de Leijas Sorano, Ministro de Ultramar" (Box 58: 8640004, November 8, 1864).

67 Misioneros, *Cien años de evangelización en Guinea Ecuatorial*.

affected the colonial educational polity in Fernando Poo. In fact, the Berlin Conference (1884–85) immediately followed the arrival of the Claretians in Fernando Poo (1883), in a context of a more aggressive Spanish commitment to the island. By 1884, the Spanish governor José Montes de Oca became more serious about implementing the 1865 decision prohibiting any non-Catholic presence in Fernando Poo. He explicitly singled out the Methodist presence on the island and the primary school they were running.⁶⁸ The Jesuit superior, Irísarri, seemed to have been in favor of this shift in strategy. In 1865, he directed the following words to the overseas minister: “In order to convert the Bubi to Catholicism and ensure their loyalty to Spain, there will need to be a system of colonial production serving Spanish companies, along with the limitation or progressive extinction of Anglo-Protestant presence, including that of Krumanes from British colonies.”⁶⁹

The Claretians had been running the mission for seven years when, on February 15, 1890, the protest of Maria Smith and nineteen other Fernandian mothers took place.⁷⁰ The protesters insisted that their “consciences” objected to their children being educated in schools that professed a creed different from theirs. And since “native” women in Santa Isabel could not “communicate to their children the light enkindled in their souls,” because there was no center in Fernando Poo able to form these women to become schoolmistresses, they asked the governor to allow Smith to become a schoolmistress. They argued that Smith had not only been educated with the Catholic Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Santa Isabel but that she had also previously studied in Lagos (with Protestants) and would thus be able to run a school for their children.⁷¹

Certain aspects of the mothers’ demands require further clarification. First, they claimed that the Catholic faith was not their own, and that it was not proper for their children to be educated in Catholic schools. Consequently, despite the official expulsion of Protestant missionaries from Fernando Poo in 1865 when the Jesuits were still running the mission,⁷² it is clear that the Protestants had remained very active on the island. They even survived the expulsion of the Jesuits. Protestant women, especially, were involved in different activities, including education and running schools, caring for the sick, and direct evangelization.

68 Garcías Cantús, *Fernando Poo*, 554.

69 Irísarri, *Misión de Fernando Poo*, 1859, 11.

70 ULTRAMAR, 5310, EXP. 14, nos. 1–9, October 4, 1890.

71 ULTRAMAR, 5310, Exp. no. 3.

72 Irísarri, *Misión de Fernando Poo*, 1859, 11.

In January 1873, for example, eight years after their official expulsion, Bella A. Nassau, a missionary woman, wrote to the sisters of the Auxiliary Society of Marion, Iowa. She asked for help for the Corisco mission: "Ten years ago [two years before the expulsion of the Jesuits], a girls' school was in successful existence on Corisco Island, as well as a boys' school and a church station. But for six years there has been no school at all for girls and women."⁷³ She then asked for new missionaries to replace the missionaries who had died, and expressed the need to build houses in which "female missionaries may live, with the poor girls and women gathered around them." The letter finally goes on to say that there had been an increase in the number of African personnel in the missionary work.⁷⁴

Moreover, these women were adept at interpreting and using Fernando Poo's colonial education laws to pursue their own interests. They carefully exploited legal loopholes to advance their own agenda. They started their request to the governor by complaining that they could not teach their children because they were not "certified" to teach in schools. Owning an official certificate was a key requirement of the 1890 laws in order to teach in a school. More specifically, they mention that there was "no [pedagogical] center" in Fernando Poo to train them, and therefore, help them receive those certificates. In other words, if a central requirement of the royal committee of 1890 was the creation of normal schools in colonies to train certified teachers,⁷⁵ then the governor ought to implement the law by creating a normal school, or simply accept Smith's request. Furthermore, in making the case of Smith's singular credentials, probably unique on the island, these women are referring to another requirement that applied to Catholic missionaries from the time of the Jesuits. Being bilingual was an asset, not a hindrance, for the success of their mission.⁷⁶ As far as the mothers were concerned, nobody was as bilingual, and therefore as well prepared, as Smith not only to teach but also to "rule" any school in Fernando Poo.

The governor ruled against Smith's request on March 12, 1890. However, in his ruling, he also suggested that, according to a royal decree of October 12, 1884, it was legally possible for Smith or any other person without a certificate to teach in Fernando Poo. The only obstacle to Smith, he said, was that

73 WWFW, January 1873, 270.

74 Ibid., 171. For Sir Matomba and the wife of Rev. Ibia were getting ready to do "the work of God."

75 ULTRAMAR, 5310, EXP. 7, nos. 1–4, March 17, 1890.

76 Zarandona, "Proyecto de una misión a las islas españolas del Golfo de Guinea. Presentado en la Dirección de Ultramar Por A–Z, El 4 de Mayo de 1857."

she did not know the Spanish language.⁷⁷ Not only was the governor's ruling contrary to laws organizing the missions in Fernando Poo; it also contradicted the same law upon which he based his own ruling. The decree of 1884 to which he was referring also allowed teaching to be conducted in a different language and religion, although it prohibited proselytism in schools. In addition, since the same governor had previously allowed a lay Methodist, named Barleycorn, who had no knowledge of the Spanish language, to teach in a school,⁷⁸ the denial of the same right to the more talented Smith had more to do with her gender than anything else.

The ruling in favor of Barleycorn was an acknowledgment that the 1888 decree formalizing the Catholic monopoly on Fernando Poo did not explicitly prohibit the presence of another religion in the colony. In fact, there had always been Protestant children—though only a few of them—in the Jesuit schools in Fernando Poo.⁷⁹ In addition, the Fernandians themselves had made little progress in learning Spanish. Therefore, Protestant schools teaching in English were legally allowed in Fernando Poo and its dependencies, on condition that the children learning in those schools should also learn to speak Spanish and become bilingual.⁸⁰ Finally, in the *Dictamen general* (General declaration) of November 3, 1890, the government council recommended that, for the conversion of the Fernandians to have a lasting impact, the Claretian fathers had to effect conversion through the example of virtue rather than violence. The superiority of the Catholic faith would take care of itself.⁸¹

Conclusion

In Fernando Poo, early missionary writings had little or nothing to say about women. Until the 1870s, the few references to the Fernandian women reduced them to their function in society as spouses (of men and of Christ) and “slaves” of their husbands and the patriarchal ruling elite. The first attempts to have

77 ULTRAMAR, 5310, EXP. 7, no. 3.

78 ULTRAMAR, 5310, EXP. 14, nos. 1–9, October 4, 1890.

79 Irisarri, *Misión de Fernando Poo*, 1859.

80 Ibid.

81 “Para nuestros padres misioneros, será un día glorioso, aquel en que destruyan las sectas del protestantismo existentes en Fernando Poo, con el ejemplo de sus virtudes, con la persuasión y con el ejercicio de la caridad que tanta influencia tiene sobre todos los espíritus, al paso que, empleando la violencia no se conseguirá otra cosa que irritar los ánimos, aumentar el número de los desafectos, y hacer infructuoso el trabajo de su conversión en que estamos comprometidos.”

women actively participate in missionary work took place in the second half of the nineteenth century with the wives of Protestant missionaries, and the fourteen women who were part of Martínez Sanz's expedition. For reasons related to the nature of their institution, but which had more to do with the particular conservative context of the Society in Spain after the restoration, the Jesuits were unable to provide effective education for girls. This situation became unsustainable with the arrival of the Claretians. Their clash with educated Fernandian women involved the excessive use of force that led to the torture of Ndjuke, demonizing her, destroying her character, and ultimately resulting in her death.

Portrayed as adulteresses by their male opponents, women in Fernando Poo were true reformers, pioneers of the emancipation of women a century before Spanish women descended on the streets of Madrid, Zaragoza, and Barcelona. They skillfully reacted to the changing power dynamics in Fernando Poo in different ways. They used civil protests by refusing to send their children to Catholic schools and demonstrated against government policies. Fernandian mothers outsmarted the governor and the apostolic prefect in the interpretation of Spanish law, and so contributed to substantial changes in education policies in Fernando Poo.

The effectiveness of the women's strategy was reflected in the resolutions of the *Dictamen*. These resolutions empowered Fernandian women, granting them the same rights as men (including equal pay) as far as education was concerned. In fostering bilingualism, even for a transitional period, women leaders whose *lingua franca* was Pidgin English were further empowered. Their role in society as mothers and their intellectual abilities gave them greater control over the education of their children. Because of these women, there was no longer any need to have a state certificate to become a teacher or schoolmistress in Fernando Poo. By October 27, 1890, primary education had become mandatory (and free at the district level) for both boys and girls in the Philippines, and thus in Fernando Poo.⁸² The same decree of October 27, 1890 also said that the instruction could be both public and domestic,⁸³ depending on what the parents had chosen for their children.⁸⁴ Domestic education in which women played a central role was recognized. And the Catholic monopoly that was at the core of the entire colonial project never became an absolute reality,

82 ULTRAMAR 5310, 19, nos. 1–5.

83 In this polygamist context, women often have their own house (cf. Edmundo Sepa Bona-ba, *España en la Isla de Fernando Po [1843–1968]: Colonización y fragmentación de la sociedad Bubi* [Barcelona: Icaria, 2011], 92–93).

84 Ibid.

at least until after the 1900s when the government introduced lethal force and Fernando Poo had officially become a Catholic state.⁸⁵ Liberal education policies promoted by laymen and women had won the school debate in Fernando Po, at least during the period examined in this essay.⁸⁶

Bibliography

Archives

AGA: Archivo General de la Administración.

AHA: Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Castilla (y Toledo) de la Compañía de Jesús en Alcalá de Henares.

AHL: Archivo Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús en Loyola.

ARES: Archivo Nacional de España.

Digital Collections of Yale University, Periodicals:

Home of Foreign Record of Protestant Missions (HFR), Years 1851–90.

Women Working for Women (WWFW), Years 1872–90.

<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/day-missions-collection-periodicals-listing>
(accessed June 25, 2017).

Primary Sources

Crowther, Samuel, and James F. Schön. *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther Who, with the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841, in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society*. London: Hatchard and Son, 1842.

Irisarri, José. *Misión de Fernando Poo, 1859*. Barcelona: Ceibas, 1998.

85 Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, "Which Countries Have State Religions?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (November 2005): 1331–70, here 1336.

86 The outcome of this debate over education also sheds new light on the murder of Ndjuke. She was the product of the education debate that started with the Jesuits in 1864. The governor had aimed to create a public school that would limit Jesuit control over education. But its success almost brought down the colonial project altogether, as it failed to Catholicize Fernando Poo through the means of education, an area where Protestants seemed to have a stronger hand. By 1894, the year she was murdered, Ndjuke had become a schoolmistress and a leader. The accusation of sexual misbehavior was the manifestation of an increased sense of unease among the male elite of Fernando Poo, both secular and religious. Their alliance around Ndjuke's corpse can therefore be seen as an attempt by men to reaffirm their power over women by all means.

- Martínez y Sanz, Miguel. *Breves apuntes de la misión de Fernando Poo en el Golfo de Guinea*. Madrid: Imprenta de Iñigo Reneses, 1859.
- Misioneros, Claretianos, ed. *Cien años de evangelización en Guinea Ecuatorial, 1883–1983*. Barcelona: Claret, 1983.
- Usera y Alarcón, Jerónimo M. *Memoria de la Isla de Fernando Poo*. Madrid: T. Aguado, 1848.
- Zarandona, Antonio. "Al Excmo. Sr. D. Manuel de Leijas Sorano, Ministro de Ultramar." Ch. 58: 8640004, November 8, 1864.
- Zarandona, Antonio. "Proyecto de una misión a las islas españolas del Golfo de Guinea: Presentado en la Dirección de Ultramar Por A-Z, El 4 de Mayo de 1857," n.d. AHA. C 458, n. 8570009.

Secondary Sources

- Barro, Robert J., and Rachel M. McCleary. "Which Countries Have State Religions?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (November 2005): 1331–70.
- Bennett, Anita, and Jill Nichols. "Women's Movement in Spain." *Off Our Backs* 7 (October 1977): 10.
- Bernos, Marcel. *Femmes et gens d'Église dans la France classique, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Cerf, 2003.
- Burns, Robert I., ed. *Las siete partidas: The Dead, the Criminal, and the Marginalized*. Vol. 5. 7 Vols. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Cabral Feliz de Souza, Isabela. "The Educational Background of Women Working for Women in Rio de Janeiro." *Convergence* 31 (1998): 30–37.
- Creus, Jacint. *Action missionnaire en Guinée Equatoriale 1858–1910: Perplexités et naïvetés à l'aube de la colonisation*. Paris: Université Paris VII, 1998.
- DeNapoli Morris, Alanna Catherine. "Female Missionaries in the Jesuit Relations: A Study of the Creators of the Ursulines Seminary in Quebec." MTS thesis, Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 2005.
- Egan, Keith J. "Historia del Carmelo Español, Vol II–IV, by Balbino Velasco Bayón." *Catholic Historical Review* 81 (1995): 611–13.
- Enyegue, Jean Luc. "The Jesuits in Fernando Po, 1858–1872: An Incomplete Mission." In *Jesuits' Survival and Restoration: A Global History*, edited by Robert A. Maryks and Jonathan Wright, 466–86. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Fullam, Lisa. *Juana, S.J.: The Past (and Future?) Status of Women in the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, 1999.
- Garcías Cantús, Dolores. *Fernando Poo: Una aventura colonial española en la África occidental; 1778–1900*. Barcelona: Ceibas, 2006.
- Gray, Richard. "The Kongo Kingdom and the Papacy A Unique Conclave of Christianity in the Heart of 17th-Century Africa." *History Today* 47, no. 1 (1997): 44–49.

- Gray, Richard. "A Kongo Princess, the Kongo Ambassadors and the Papacy." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29 (May 1999): 140–54.
- Irísarri, José. *Misión de Fernando Poo, 1859*. Barcelona: Ceibas, 1998.
- Kirkpatrick, Susan. "Gender and Modernist Discourse: Emilia Pardo Barzán's Dulce Dueño." In *Modernism and Its Margins*, ed. Anthony L Geist and José Monleón, 117–39. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999.
- Lacouture, Jean. *Jesuits: A Multibiography*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995.
- Misioneros, Claretianos, ed. *Cien años de evangelización en Guinea Ecuatorial, 1883–1983*. Barcelona: Claret, 1983.
- Onomo Etaba, Roger. *Histoire de l'Eglise catholique du Cameroun, de Grégoire xv à Jean-Paul II (1831–1991)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007.
- Sepa Bonaba, Edmundo. *España en la Isla de Fernando Po (1843–1968): Colonización y fragmentación de la sociedad Bubi*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2011.
- Vilaró i Güell, Miquel. *El legado de los jesuitas en Guinea*. Barcelona: Ceibas, 2010.
- Zamora, San Cristóbal de la Habana o. "Jerónimo Mariano Usera Y Alarcón (1810–1891): Sacerdote y fundador de la congregación de las Hermanas del Amor de Dios; Positivo sobre las virtudes y fama de santidad." Congregación de las Causas de los Santos, 1995.
- Zarandona, Antonio. "Al Excmo. Sr. D. Manuel de Leijas Sorano, Ministro de Ultramar." Ch. 58: 8640004, November 8, 1864.
- Zarandona, Antonio. *Historia de la extinción y restablecimiento de la Compañía de Jesús*. Edited by Ricardo Cappa. Vol. 3. 3 Vols. Madrid: Luis Aguado, 1890.
- Zarandona, Antonio. "Proyecto de una misión a las islas españolas del Golfo de Guinea. Presentado en la Dirección de Ultramar Por A–Z, El 4 de Mayo de 1857," n.d. AHA. C 458, no. 8570009.