

Introduction. Science and Visual Colonialism

In 2013, one of the main topics for the *PHotoEspaña* meeting was “Body, Eros, and Politics,” and included an exhibit entitled “Savoir c’est pouvoir,” organised by the Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP), France.

This exhibit presented photographs from different artists, such as Sammi Baloji, who displayed a photomontage with historical black and white photographs of slave workers of the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (Congo), superimposed over recent colour photographs of the company’s now abandoned facilities. For the artist, imposing the past on present images was a way to denounce past and present abuses.

These actions are moved by the same spirit that drives this volume. In the early 2020s, more and more voices are demanding the revision of colonial pasts, to the extent that former colonial metropolises, such as France and Belgium, have begun to restore pieces of African cultural heritage, for instance, the restitution of a *kakuungu*, a rare mask used by the Suku in their rites of passage, to the National Museum of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Beatriz Navarro. “Bélgica se quita la máscara colonial.” *La Vanguardia*, viernes, 10 de junio de 2022, p. 10).

In this context, tackling the relationship between science, racism, and photography, against the background of colonialism and its immediate outcome – the discrimination, marginality, and exploitation of non-western peoples – is still necessary. And this is so even if, after the Second World War unveiled the consequences of the racist ideologies of totalitarian governments, the interrelation between science and race became the subject of many important studies, for instance, when the magazine *Les Temps Modernes* (1970-1971) revised the relationship between anthropology and colonialism.

From our perspective, the study of this matter in the field of the history of science is marked by two major milestones: the publication of Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981), and, in Spain, that of José Luis Peset Reig’s *Ciencia y marginación. Sobre negros, locos y criminales* (1983, 2019), two works that have left a deep imprint on later studies on the relationship between science and racism. In this project, we seek to transcend textual expressions and study the exclusion of marginalised groups and the effect of colonialism on other cultures and peoples from a visual perspective.

Our research examines the theories and tools developed to explain differences between human groups based on their phenotype. In this work we shall use the word “race” as a cultural construction and an analytical category, insofar as it is used in colonial sources and discourses (Bancel, David, and Thomas, 2014), often in association

with photographs and scientific discourses, as noted by Morris-Reich’s *Race and Photography* (2016). Following the path set out by Pascal Blanchard and ACHAC (2011, 2018), one of the most active groups in the study of colonialism and its racial implications, it can be argued that images and glorification discourses were powerful allies of colonialism all the way to the decolonisation process. These images, which percolated all aspects of life, were propaganda and seduction but also education and leisure; sometimes they were made of exoticism and sometimes of violence. They not only portrayed Europe’s civilisational destiny but also made colonial culture alive across the whole of society. Between 1875 and 1935, hundreds of thousands of postcards, depicting ‘scenes and types’, indigenous peoples presented from the angle of otherness, were printed to popularise and disseminate stereotypes among the metropolitan public. In order to understand the propaganda that seduced the audience and engraved racism and discrimination in their minds, we need to know how these images were produced. As noted by Walter Benjamin, models were frozen in an instant, often in a studio, surrounded by artificial paraphernalia to envelop stereotypes with some aesthetic appeal (Benjamin, 2015). Roland Barthes’s *La Chambre Claire* (1980) argues that photography forced subjects to become objects, almost a museum display, to adopt a pose that suited the photographer. Subjects were frozen in time as ghosts for the audience to examine, sparking the observer’s interest, pique, or thoughts. Susan Sontag (2006) argues that photographs may be the most mysterious objects, creating and densifying the environment that we recognise as modern. They are, in addition, like a captured experience, the ideal weapon to appropriate the subject, an apparent form of knowledge and power.

Colonial images tend to present colonised peoples, men and women, as a source of fantasy and stereotypes (Guardiola, 2006). Deserts, Tuaregs and ‘Moors’ in the Maghreb; backward groups susceptible to be civilised in black Africa, including Spanish Equatorial Guinea; opium smokers, rice farmers, and concubines in Indochina; almost prehistoric ‘little Negroes’ in the Philippines; islanders and cannibals in Oceania; Fueguinos and Mapuches lost at the end of the world; impoverished ‘Indians’ and Afro-Americans in Brazil, México, and the Caribbean. In the European imaginary, the ‘civilising mission prevails’. While colonial domination creates borders, metropolitan populations are invited to discover ‘natives’ in veritable human zoos. In addition, as noted by Patou-Mathis (2011), for the 19th-century west the ‘other’ had two faces; the other in space and prehistoric humans, the other

in time. Two superimposing imaginaries forged in erudite circles, were disseminated among the public through illustrated and travel magazines, novels, universal and colonial exhibits, and museums. From the start, prehistory and, it follows, human palaeontology carried a heavy racial burden that sustained western prejudices and hierarchies of superior and inferior races.

Photography is one of the most important sources of evidence about European colonial activity between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries, when the decolonisation process began and new nations emerged (Edwards & Hart, 2004; Helff & Michels, 2018). As noted by James R. Ryan (2014), in the best reference work for Portuguese colonial photography, *O Imperio da Visao*, edited by Filipa Lowndes Vicente, the use of simple cameras allowed for images taken by colonists, soldiers, government officials, missionaries and, sometimes, colonised subjects, to join those taken by professional photographers. This legacy of western colonialism and imperialism is susceptible of analysis by collectors, historians, art historians, anthropologists, etc.

Historians traditionally use photographs as mere illustration of their text. Many times, they were presented as nostalgic recreations of the allegedly glorious colonial past, while authors critical of colonialism used it for the opposite purpose but always in isolation from the textual discourse and without taking into consideration the circumstances of the actual photograph or of the author. After Jill R. Dias's (1991) pioneering works on the Portuguese colonial photographic legacy, historians of empire, orientalis, and specialists in post-colonialism have developed new avenues of research that take into account the role played by cultural formations and systems of representation in the exercise of imperial or colonial power (Ryan, 1997; Hight & Sampson, 2002; McClintock, 1995). Later, the possibility of a different approach, the history of the images themselves, independent from text and oral traditions, began to crystallise (Landau & Kaspin, 2002; Poole, 1997; Pinney, 1997).

The popularisation of photography in the second half of the 19th century coincided with a period of European colonial expansion, so the new technique became global very rapidly. In addition, photography had the ability to preserve images of people and places objectively, at least in theory. The images published in the metropolis alongside text allowed for some degree of control – real or symbolic – over colonial spaces and subjects (Pinney, 2011). In addition, this colonial gaze enjoyed some success in other territories, such as Latin America, which approached indigenous and Afro-American peoples at a formative time for their national identity, parallel to the development of anthropology and photography (Navarrete, 2017).

Expeditions, sponsored by scientific and erudite societies, as well as by government bodies in Portugal, Great Britain, France, etc. promoted the collection of graphic collections of colonial architecture, ethnology, geography, and infrastructure, like José dos Santos Rufino's *Albums Fotograficos e Descritivos de Moçambique* (Hamburg,

Broschek, 1929). In Spain, the expeditions organised in the first third of the 20th century by the National Museum of Natural Science and the Royal Botanic Gardens – to North Africa and, in the 1940s, also to other territories – in cooperation with the Instituto de Estudios Africanos, are still to be studied in detail. For Guinea, however, there is already Inés Plasencia Camps's excellent doctoral dissertation, *Imagen y ciudadanía en Guinea Ecuatorial (1861-1937): del encuentro fotográfico al orden colonial* (2017). We must also mention the naturalists of the Junta para Ampliación de Estudios, which created a Committee of Retrospective Natural History Studies, in the Royal Academy of Exact, Physical, and Natural Sciences, which aimed to vindicate a scientific tradition rooted in modern Europe's rationalism. The members of the committee hoped to be very active during the International Exhibition held in Barcelona in 1929 and the Ibero-American Exhibit to be held in Seville in 1932. Ignacio Bolívar's scientific interest had led him to work, from his position in the Spanish Society of Natural History, on the results of the expedition to the Pacific, and to study African fauna. This resulted in several publications on the fauna of Fernando Poo, the Gulf of Guinea, and Western Sahara, in 1886, and on the African orthopteras in the Museum of Lisbon's collection, in 1889. In 1901, a committee was organised under the chairmanship of Bolívar, and with the presence of Martínez de la Escalera, Blas Lázaro Ibiza, and Salvador Calderón; eventually, this crystallised in the organisation of the Permanent Committee for the Exploration of northeast África in 1905. This committee was part of the Royal Society of Natural History, and organised Lucas Fernández Navarro's and Manuel Martínez de la Escalera's expeditions. Spanish naturalists argued that Spain must be present in Africa with more than soldiers and generals, requesting the creation of a biological laboratory in Tangiers. Although the priority was the study of the flora and fauna of the Iberian Peninsula, Africa was another major subject of interest. In 1919, Ángel Cabrera, assisted by Manuel García Llorens, worked in the Rif region, to which Lucas Fernández returned a year later to carry out geological studies. Odón de Buen and his Oceanographic Institute organised several ichthyological expeditions. The expedition to the Rif launched by the museum's entomologists, led by Cándido Bolívar and Manuel Martínez de la Escalera, in the 1930s, deserves special mention. This was preceded in the 1920s by studies on Guinean fauna in the museum's collections. The entomological interest in Morocco was not only scientific but also political and economic (Otero Carvajal, and López Sánchez, 2012). The study of the anthropological work undertaken by these expeditions to Africa is still pending, although Luis Calvo (1997), a leading researcher in the field of visual anthropology, has made significant contributions, including a recent article entitled "Progreso, confinamiento y espectáculo" (Calvo, 2020). Other interesting inventories are presented in Antonio González Bueno and Alberto Gomis's (2007), *Los Territorios Olvidados Estudio Histórico y diccionario de los naturalistas españoles en el África hispana (1860-1936)*. Similarly,

the photographic colonial legacy of the North African colonies, which has already been the subject of some publications (López García, 2018; Ortiz-Echagüe, 2013), remains largely untapped.

On the other hand, after the creation of the Ethnology Museum in Barcelona (1949) (MEB), photography acquired a prominent role in the scientific study of Spanish and foreign cultural expressions. It is important to emphasise that the MEB was created as an institution dedicated to the understanding of “Races, Cultures, and Peoples,” the museum’s name’s subtitle, and this was pushed forth with ethnological expeditions funded by the Barcelona City Council and sometimes private sponsors. In this way, between 1951 and 1976, the MEB organised twenty expeditions abroad, not only including Spanish colonial territories in Africa, like Guinea, but other continents as well. The racial element was always at the forefront of the MEB’s expeditions, and the graphic record is directly rooted in the standards of 19th-century biological-racial photography. The pre-eminence of biology in the MEB was embodied by the display of sculptures that presented racial typologies. Similarly, the museum’s numerous popular publications on ‘human races’ helped to consolidate the idea that biology was a determinant factor for culture. The study of the photographs in the archive of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, belonging to CSIC, the Institute of African Studies, the Ethnology Museum, and the National Anthropology Museum could shed light on the construction of colonial otherness and European identity from a Spanish nationalist perspective.

Concerning the study of colonial photography, Spain lags behind other European countries, although some important works of reference are already available (Ortiz, Sánchez-Carreter, and Cea, 2005; Naranjo, 2006; López and Sánchez, 2020), and some case-studies have also been published (Verde, 1993, 1994). We must also mention the exhibit, mostly of photographs, organised by the National Anthropology Museum to commemorate the Philippine Exhibit held in 1887 (Sánchez Gómez, 2002; Mingote and Suárez, 2017). Busts, funerary masks, and ethnic mannequins have been paid much less attention to date. Some works on the history of the National Anthropology Museum mention them in passim (see Bibliography for references), but they add little to our knowledge. One exception is Carmen Ortiz’s (2019) recent article about the collection of ethnic busts that arrived at the museum in the late 19th century through the mediation of Diego Ripoché.

Colonialism stimulated a global market of photographs of all sorts, first as daguerrotypes and later as *carte-de-visite* and stereoscopic views. The emergence of photography opened new worlds to the 19th-century public, who could now see themselves and the outer world in unprecedented detail and presumed objectivity (Schwartz & Ryan, 2009). Photographs were displayed in specialised – e.g. Exposição Internacional de Photographia, held in Oporto in 1886 – and colonial exhibits in several European countries, including Portugal (Ferraz de Matos, 2013; Maxwell, 1999). Colonial discourses elaborated in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,

especially concerning the Spanish Antilles (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo), had several aims, notably to influence public opinion by presenting, while justifying, why their rule was necessary and how it was to be done; for this, a subaltern alterity based on stereotypical images had to be built (Thompson, 2010). These images pitched civilisation and progress against backwardness and primitivism. The faces depicted built cultural and ethnic alterity and contributed to hierarchise and sustain racial categories and to racialize territories, trying to demonstrate that decadence was the product of both the ruled and the nation that had ruled them, especially Spain, which justified the need for American tutelage (Kramer, 2006). Visual messages contained the concepts that, throughout the 19th century, were used to interpret and define a society. In their composition, which varied from period to period, we find ethnic, economic, political, and cultural keys. The racialization of barbarism is a widespread phenomenon in texts circulating in the Antilles and Central America in the 19th and 20th centuries, in which barbarism was linked to cultural features with African roots. Another interesting expression of alterity and racialization of the other concerns the confrontation between two nations, Spain and the United States; it is the dissolution of the tension between empires, because one of them has been deprived of any positive trait. Colonial discourses a built on race, culture, and modernity (Naranjo Orovio & Puig-Samper, 2009).

This volume explores the colonial work of CSIC’s Instituto Bernardino Sahagún through its graphic records of Spanish Guinea, the peculiar case of aboriginal Canarians and their representation in Europe, the imaginary comparison of Australian aborigines and prehistoric man, and the image of Gauchos as the prototype of Argentinian mestizos.

There is little doubt that photography was a weapon of colonial domination, and that many times it constructed an imaginary reality that had little to do with real colonial worlds. Cameras recorded what the observer wanted to suit their own agendas, and the results were later observed and interpreted by Europeans. Conversely, photographs were also a way to denounce excesses committed in Africa, for instance, by Leopold II in Congo (Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips, 2006). Years after decolonisation, we are in a better position to understand yesterday’s images, decodify today’s representations, and understand colonial history differently. We think that, to a large extent, colonialism is at the roots of contemporary racism and xenophobia, after the hierarchisation of the ‘other’ and the false scientific conclusions based on biology.

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