

## **Anthropology and image in colonial contexts: the scientific expedition to Spanish territories in the Gulf of Guinea (1948)\***

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**ABSTRACT:** Spanish Guinea, as the largest Spanish colonial territory in sub-Saharan Africa, was the object of scientific attention by several official Spanish institutions such as the Institute of African Studies (IDEA) and the Ethnological and Colonial Museum of Barcelona (MECB). Both were interested in describing and documenting the colony's ways of life and sponsored the 1948 Expedition to Spanish Guinea that inaugurated other MECB study trips during the 1950s. Images, in various formats (drawing, photography, etc.), played a significant role in these investigations, becoming a major instrument to describe the colony's past and present. In this way, it not only contributed to consolidating the Spanish colonial vision and actions but also helped to confirm, scientifically, the subordination of the indigenous populations to the metropolitan colonial power. This article presents the details of the 1948 Expedition as well as the visual record generated. Finally, some reflections are made on the role of images in this context.

**KEYWORDS:** Spanish Guinea; Anthropology; Colonialism; Image.

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**RESUMEN:** *Antropología e imagen en contextos coloniales: la expedición científica a los territorios españoles del Golfo de Guinea (1948).*— La Guinea española, como el mayor territorio colonial español en la África subsahariana, fue objeto de atención científica por parte de diversas instituciones oficiales españolas como el Instituto de Estudios Africanos (IDEA) y el Museo Etnológico y Colonial de Barcelona (MECB). Ambos mostraron interés en describir y documentar las formas de vida de la colonia por lo que patrocinaron la Expedición del 1948 a la Guinea española que inauguró otros viajes de estudio del MECB durante la década de 1950. La imagen, en sus diversos formatos (dibujo, fotografía, etc.), tuvo un papel significativo en estas investigaciones, convirtiéndose en sí misma en un instrumento de primer orden para describir el pasado y el presente de la colonia. De esta forma, ya no solo se contribuía a consolidar la visión y la actuación colonial española, sino que se ayudaba a confirmar, científicamente, la subordinación de las poblaciones indígenas al poder colonial metropolitano. El presente artículo presenta los pormenores de la Expedición de 1948 así como todo aquello referido al registro gráfico que en ella se llevó a cabo. Finalmente, se apuntan algunas reflexiones sobre el papel de la imagen en este contexto.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Guinea española; Antropología; Colonialismo; Imagen.

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## PRESENTATION

On 2 June 2021, five black researchers working at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab-USA) published the statement “Change Now,” demanding the managers of this scientific institution to do their utmost to achieve racial justice and equality in the laboratory. This led to an initiative (<https://changenowphysics.com>) that has triggered a process of reflection in many institutions. This was one of the many antiracist statements caused by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer. This death sparked numerous protests and, in an interesting spin-off, a significant movement that requested the revision of historical narratives marked by colonialism,<sup>1</sup> racism, and slavery,<sup>2</sup> as well as denouncing ongoing institutional racism.<sup>3</sup>

Some may wonder why I begin a text about a scientific expedition to Spanish Guinea in the 1940s with this. The answer to this question is that I am convinced that historical knowledge is key to understanding the roots of things that, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are still with us. Among them, a growing revisionist trend for change, conceal, and even negate past forms of discrimination, exploitation,<sup>4</sup> and so-called ‘silent colonial violence’, which still affect native populations, for instance, in terms of health.<sup>5</sup>

As often stated (Gallerano, 2007), past and present are intertwined so intimately that many current situations can hardly be understood without looking back from a certain presentist perspective. In this regard, we may still rally behind Marc Bloch when he stated that ignoring the past is not only detrimental to our understanding of the present but even compromises present action.<sup>6</sup> In the case at hand, several studies have emphasised the need to delve in the past to understand: “... the impact of Spanish colonialism in modern Morocco and Equatorial Guinea, by activating the relationship between colonialism and post-colonialism” (Aixelà-Cabré, 2015, pp. 16-17).

For this reason, in addition to presenting the expedition, with special emphasis on its graphic production, this text aims to raise, again, awareness about situations that seemed something of the past but which, sadly, are still very present in our social, cultural, and political dynamics.

## THE SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO THE SPANISH TERRITORIES IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

Since the beginning of the process of institutionalisation of Spanish anthropology in the 1970s, numerous authors have written about the history of the discipline in the country. Despite this, some aspects of Spanish anthropology’s history remain little known, although they deserve more attention, not only in their own right but because this avenue of research can contribute, albeit modestly, to the aims stated above. Methodologically, it should be pointed out that the research presented in this article follows the examination of significant and unpublished documents in the archives of the Museu Etnològic de Barcelona.

## The political-institutional background

The 1948 Expedition is framed by several institutional initiatives in which science played a prominent role in the consolidation of the Francoist state that emerged after the Spanish Civil War.

Especially significant was the foundation of CSIC’s Instituto Bernardino de Sahagún de Antropología y Etnología (IBSAE), whose aim was to vindicate Spain’s central position in these disciplines, bringing together Empire and Catholicism (Sánchez Gómez, 1992, p. 31), and to create a “new Spanish man” and “improve the race” (Sánchez Gómez, 1992, p. 39). According to the *Memoria de la Secretaría General del CSIC de 1940-1941* (1942, p. 432), the Instituto’s targets were:

- a. The anthropological study of the Spanish people in the past and the present, including both living individuals and skeletal remains, and the sections of child growth, constitutional and endocrinal typology, hematoanthropology, and inheritance will be created when required.
- b. The study of customs, arts, and popular beliefs in Spain, Morocco, and the Colonies.<sup>7</sup>

Broadly speaking, this was the political-institutional framework that guided the action of the Dirección General de Marruecos y Colonias and the Instituto de Estudios Africanos (IDEA) (Calvo, 1997a), which became the most visible institutional tools of the Spanish colonial action in the post-war years (Díaz de Villegas et al., 1949). In this way, it may be stated that “for Francoism, the African colonies were a display case, a prestige factor, and a source of gain for those sectors that followed the doctrine” (Morales Lezcano, 1986, p. 84).

The vindication of Spain’s role in Africa, halfway between propaganda, essentialism, nostalgia, and evangelisation, must be framed within the Spanish colonial ideology of the period:

Portugal’s and Spain’s work among less advanced peoples has constituted, and still does so today, the purest and most exact interpretation of colonial doctrines. For this action, there are no inferior races, or sick peoples, or men that should endure the domination of another; their oppression is a product of their own backwardness. Spain, by approaching them with outstretched hand, aims to ambitiously carry out a mission that has never been challenged in her long history: *elevating the peoples with whom it comes in contact to her own level*. It is to achieve this that she arrives with her religion, culture, civilisational tools of every kind; she endeavours for these peoples to come of age as soon as possible and has not the slightest ambition or concern with regard to material profits that does not even contemplate (Vial de Morla, 1944).

Against this background, how were native populations viewed? In general terms, it may be said that they were still regarded as subaltern ethnical and social inferiors and

intellectually limited, the expression of the evolutionary stage they were in:

The display of the cultural expressions of Pamues [...] reveals the customs of simple, and somewhat infantile, people. However, the material remains found by archaeology are very similar to ours. As such, let us be indulgent and understanding, and, especially, let us be charitable with these our brothers, who have often been misunderstood and mistreated (Perramón, 1958, pp. 27-28).

Similar doubts about the individual and collective aptitudes of Africans can be found in many publications but especially during the decolonisation process, when new states emerged and the existence of African cultures was even questioned:

... thirty sovereign states with no political tradition beyond tribalism, appear now in the world stage – not to say chaos – with the typical puerile and vain attitude of all young nations gaining their new independence, an anthem, a flag, and a presidential palace [...] there is a historical Africa – from pre-dynastic Egypt to Almohad Morocco – but it must be stated, no matter how shocking it sounds, that those areas, those peoples, those cultures, were not and are not truly African. If there is a true Africa, and there is, the so-called ‘Black’ Africa, it is non-historical, and when it gains knowledge of the progress of man, it will do so as a reflection of European civilisation, of European ways of life and organisation (Del Moral, 1964, pp. 7 and 11-12).

The African Museum was among the greatest achievements of this doctrine, although the institution was never as successful as expected; although official, founded on 10 July 1946, it was not inaugurated until 17 July 1961 and it was closed by 1973.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it can be argued that finding funds for this institution was one of the incentives for numerous activities, including the 1948 Expedition.

### The scientific expedition to the Spanish territories in the Gulf of Guinea

As noted, Spanish colonial interests led to institutional initiatives, channelled through the Dirección General de Marruecos y Colonias and the IDEA, to promote knowledge about the Spanish African territories. These activities included publications (books and journals –*Archivos del IDEA*), movies (films were commissioned to the production company Hermic Films to present Spanish Guinea),<sup>9</sup> museums (Museo de Melilla, Museo de África) and scientific,<sup>10</sup> such as the sponsorship of scientific expeditions, notably:

- 1944: Guinea and Morocco. Julio Martínez Santa-Olalla (dir.) (Paleo-ethnology).
- 1944: Western Sahara. Martín Almagro and Santiago Alcobé (dirs.) (North African Prehistory and Anthropology of the Sahrawi people).
- 1948: Guinea. Santiago Alcobé (dir.) (Physical-Anthropology, Ethnology, Zoology and Geology).

- 1952. Spanish Sahara. Julio Caro Baroja (dir.) (Ethnology).

Concerning the 1948 expedition, on 13 March 1948 Colonel José Díaz de Villegas, director of the Dirección General de Marruecos y Colonias, approved “a scientific expedition to our territories in the Gulf of Guinea,”<sup>11</sup> under the direction of Alcobé, an anthropology professor at the University of Barcelona.

Why was Alcobé made responsible for the expedition, ahead of other prominent figures, such as Pérez de Barradas or Martínez Santa-Olalla? A possible explanation was Alcobé increasingly prominent role in biological anthropology in Spain:

Alcobé, who will also become the main driver of the reorganisation and modernisation of Spanish physical anthropology, consolidated around his chair [Universidad de Barcelona] a new group to reorient anthropology, which in the following decade was to breed a new batch of anthropologists in the so-called Barcelona School of Anthropology, including, among the most prominent, Miquel Fusté, José Pons, and Antonio Prevosti; these he directed towards new research fields, such as population genetics, biodemography, palaeoanthropology, and development studies, along with more traditional approaches, such as the anthropological investigation of protohistorical and historical societies in the Iberian Peninsula. Similarly, from the 1950s, Alcobé played a leading role in the reintroduction of evolutionist theory to Spanish universities (Tomás Cardoso, 2015, pp. 74-75).

As such, from his early work (Alcobé, 1945) he adopted new thematic avenues which his disciples consolidated, both in rural (Fusté, 1951) and urban contexts (Prevosti, 1945); the combination of anthropobiological and social factors resulted in some of the most significant works of the period (Calvo, 1990).

The expedition to Spanish Guinea comprised four groups: anthropology (S. Alcobé, Jesús Fernández Cabeza); zoology (Juan Gómez Menor, Joaquín Mateu Sampere, and Eugenio Ortiz de la Vega); geography (Carlos Vidal Vox and a person appointed by him); and ethnography (Augusto Panyella), which must work in cooperation with the anthropology group. Eventually, the geography group was replaced by a geology group, formed by Manuel Alía Medina and José María Fuster Casas.

The expedition began to take shape in 1947 owing to Alcobé’s exertions: “The expedition to Guinea seems firmly scheduled for the next winter, and our appointments have been endorsed, which fills me with joy.”<sup>12</sup>

The expedition (Alcobé, 1949) was initially scheduled to last 60 days (in the event, it took place in the summer of 1948, from June to September), and the members were to receive six daily expense units of 22.50 pesetas, as well as passages. In addition, the expedition had a general budget of 40,000 pesetas for “personnel, photographic material, movie film, camping material, purchase of ethnographic material, and unforeseen expenses.”<sup>13</sup> The researchers had to stick to the following conditions:

a) They will issue reports about their work, and in general about the expedition; b) If possible, their research will be sufficiently interesting for a book to be written about each topic; c) No news or studies will be published unless under the banner of this Dirección General (directly or through IDEA)."<sup>14</sup>

Beyond political bias, two aspects are worth emphasising. First, the budget was not inconsiderable: expenses fetched a total amount of 56,700 pesetas,<sup>15</sup> which, in addition to the 40,000 pesetas for general expenses, reached almost 100,000 pesetas. It is worth recalling that in the mid-1940s Spain, characterised by autarchy and rationing, the average industrial daily salary was 12.27 pesetas (approximately €0.07) and the price of milk was set at 1.40 pesetas (€0.01).<sup>16</sup> It seems clear that the Francoist state was generous with actions that benefitted the country's intellectual and scientific elite.

And second, the general budget was partially earmarked for photographic and filmographic material, which is indicative of the importance of the graphic record.

## SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORK OF THE EXPEDITION

One of the things that is worth emphasising is the intensive scientific work undertaken by the expedition members. For instance, Gómez's report indicated that:

I have collected species of aphids without finding evidence for mosaic transmission among these plants and sugar cane from maize, which is one of the plagues that causes the most harm in sugar cane plantations in other equatorial and tropical regions, and one of the crop's greatest problems (Alcobé, 1955, p. 86).

The same applies to Alía Medina's geological report:

We have identified several areas rich in magnetite and others rich in ilmenite. We visited some of the active gold extraction areas and we have reached the pertinent conclusions. In coastal formations, in addition to lignite beds, rich sometimes in amber nodules, we have found areas with large nodules of pyrolusite (Alcobé, 1955, p. 92).

Concerning the disciplinary and theoretical principles followed, the anthropological work was heavily based on historicist perspectives. As such, biological anthropology and archaeology were regarded as the basic sources of evidence for the biological, historical, cultural, and psychological understanding of the population groups under study. For this reason, the anthropology and ethnology groups – basically Alcobé, Fernández Cabeza, and Panyella – focused on defining evolutionary stages, in both biological and cultural terms: "By registering the origin of individuals, we could observe the known tribal exogamy of the groups in Continental Guinea, an ethnological feature that makes the task of the anthropobiologist easier" (Alcobé, 1955, p. 93).

In response to the political-institutional context, the close links between physical anthropology and ethnology responded to "the oft-repeated idea of 'scientific unity.' At the same time, this became a key problem for the autonomous development of ethnology and cultural anthropology" (Sánchez Gómez, 1992, p. 31).

In this way, biological and cultural principles, archaeology and ethnology, were constant points of reference in the expedition's research design:

Concerning the cultural classification of Pamues, elements of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age have been analysed; exogamic-patriarchal organisation patterns, with some matriarchal relics; animistic superstitions; sympathetic and black magics; stock-breeding; simple female agriculture; harvesting; isolated examples of trapping, of paleo-*Negro influence* [author's italics] (Alcobé, 1955, p. 95).

With regard to ethnology, it is important to emphasise the conceptual, rather than formal subordination to archaeological and prehistoric views of cultural and social evolution. In fact, ethnology was perceived as an auxiliary to archaeology-prehistory:

It is not to be wondered at [...] that the prehistorian reaches to other disciplines to reconstruct primitive humanity. Especially, it needs what we could call its sister-science: ethnology. They are so close that they could be argued to pursue the same goals, the study of primitive humans. But as archaeology does so by studying the material remains from remote periods, ethnology approaches the issue by studying existing societies in depth, because among the people that currently inhabit the planet some preserve, as fossils, social uses characteristic of prehistory. Ethnology lacks such a precise chronology as prehistory, but has the upper hand in the study of spiritual and social factors [...] Prehistory has the chronology that ethnology lacks, whereas the latter can achieve direct knowledge about the spiritual and social factors that the former can only know indirectly and very precariously (Pericot and Maluquer, 1969, pp. 12-13).

It can be said that this idea of "primitive humanity" was, *de facto*, one of the keystones of research, putting the archaeological record at the forefront, along with the ethnological one. This was a central tenet of the foundation of the Ethnological and Colonial Museum of Barcelona (MEB) (Calvo, 2021), which housed the first pieces collected by the 1948 Guinea expedition:

The Ethnological and Colonial Museum was created in 1949, in the Rosaleda building, Parque de Montjuich. To date, the museum only displays a carefully curated collection to represent archaeology; ethnology; American popular art; Japanese popular art; painting and sculpture from Tonkin; Philippine ethnography and art; the Fang and Bubi peoples in Spanish Guinea; lavish arts; the crafts from Morocco and the Rif; etc. (Cortés, 1955, p. 11)<sup>17</sup>

It is worth mentioning that this notion of 'primitive humanity' has now been replaced by other concepts, such

as ‘shared humanity’, which better explain past and present realities (Stolcke, 2019).

Concerning physical anthropology, the expedition, with the help of Spanish colonial healthcare infrastructure, collected data from 1398 “individuals” or “types” (Calvo, 1998) divided by ethnic group: Pamues (454 men and 115 women), Combes (206 men), Bubi (429 Men and 172 Women).

Similarly, samples were taken from 22 individuals for the genetic study of pigmentation. Specifically:

Numerous metric and somatoscopic features were measured [...] with a view of determining the predominant blood types, blood samples were taken from most individuals, and we have tried to preserve them so that in Spain we can determine the M, N and Rh groups [...] All of which will provide ample material to the bioanthropological study of the peoples of Spanish Guinea, not only in terms of rational morphology and serology, but also of their constitutional typology, which is intimately related with various medical issues (Alcobé, 1955, p. 33; vid. Fig. 1).

Concerning the general parameters that guided Alcobé and Panyella’s work, two significant aspects are worth stressing: first, although the texts do not make this explicit, some scientists felt the tension of making science in a context that was highly influenced by Catholicism, for

instance, the prominent geneticist and Alcobé’s disciple, Antonio Prevosti (Florensa, 2013). Second, Alcobé’s scientific approach, in contrast to Pérez de Barradas’s, director of IBSAE, followed disciplinary avenues which, over time, were to consolidate a new approach to research in Spain (Tomás Cardoso, 2015). Currently, once historical genetics is a set field and its cultural and social implications are well understood, Alcobé’s first steps can be regarded as pioneering; for instance, the biological-cultural connection made by Alcobé and Panyella and their precise analysis of the close relationship between biology and culture through exogamy, which was based on the data collected by the expedition as well as published material: “Matrimonial reciprocity between men and women is attested in some tribes, contributing to social stability and cohesion, while, from a biological perspective, this limits the expansion of exogamy by reducing genetic variability” (Alcobé and Panyella, 1951, p. 77).<sup>18</sup>

Panyella’s ethnological results were embodied by the acquisition of 550 objects for the incipient MEB,<sup>19</sup> as well as musical objects for the Museum of Music of Barcelona. He also collected material used in Fang tattoos: “which are rapidly disappearing, although they are among Africa’s most interesting tattoos” (Alcobé, 1955, p. 95).

Panyella also took numerous field notes, which were largely responsible for his future appointment as direc-

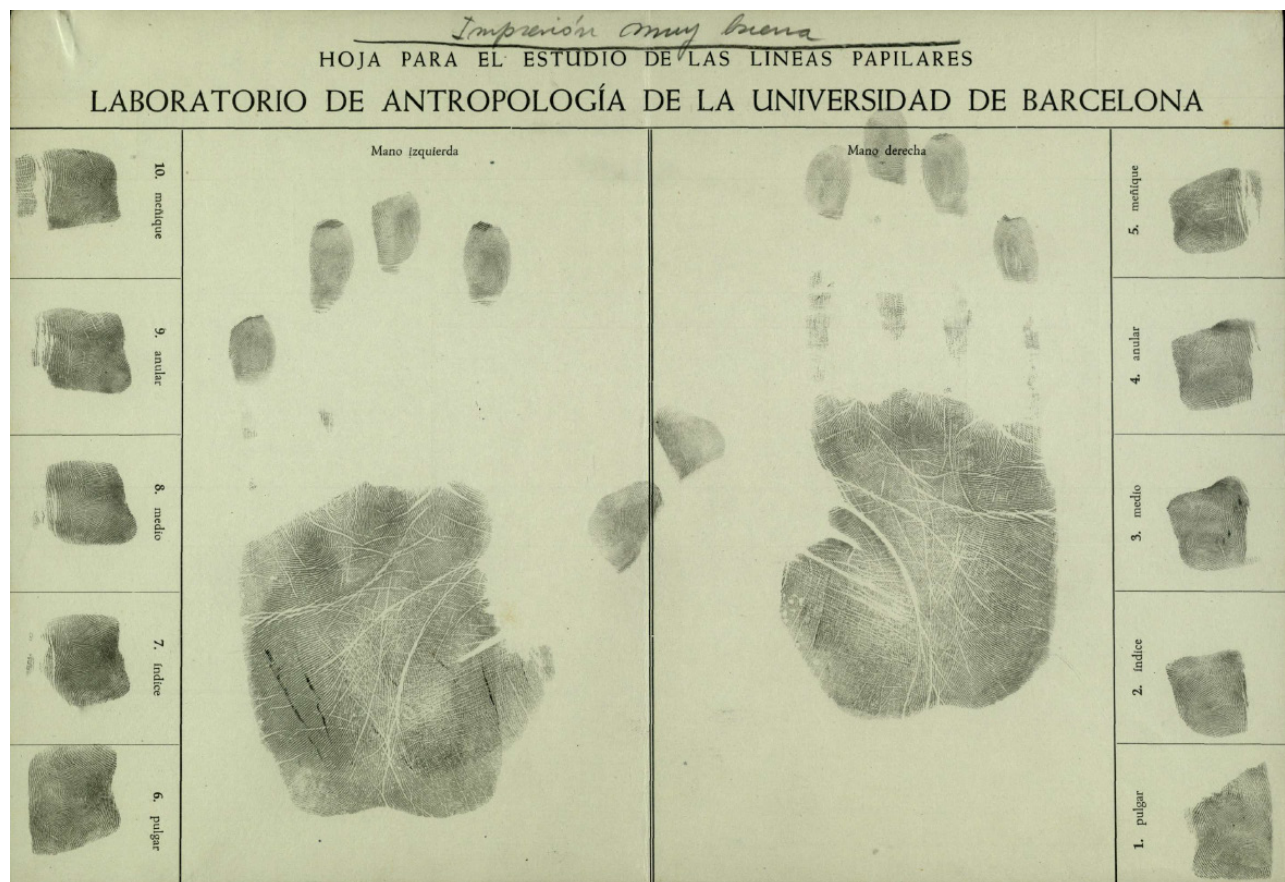


FIGURE 1. Prompt sheet for hand prints used by the scientific expedition to Spanish Guinea (Fondo documental MEB).



tor of the MEB and constituted the basis of further expeditions to Spanish Guinea and other territories from the 1950s on. This work turned Panyella into one of the most prominent Spanish ethnologies in the 1950s and 1960s, in the run-up of the institutionalisation of the discipline in Spain, which took off with the creation of the first Cultural Anthropology Department at the University of Barcelona in 1972, under the direction of Claudio Esteva Fabregat.



FIGURE 2. Augusto Panyella. Expedition to Spanish Guinea 1957 (Fondo documental MEB).

In addition, as the expedition's ethnologist, Panyella paid attention to other issues, such as the influence of the Fang from Cameroon on "our Pamues," as well as the transition of groups such as the Balengue, Bujeba, and Combe from hunting-gathering to fishing. Obviously, this frantic activity – he visited over 100 settlements, collected items, and carried out surveys about tattoos, among other things – could not follow the principles of modern fieldwork. Rather, his studies were guided by traditional ideas on foreign studies, based on brief visits to collect data with which to build a vision – or confirm an existing one – about the groups under study. It is highly significant that when he addressed: "the problem, political and ethnological, of contacts with Europeans could only be briefly addressed" (Alcobé, 1955, p. 95).

Beyond the data compiled, which in principle were, in themselves, innocuous, and their later processing, which lead to several publications (vid. Alcobé, 1950; Alcobé and Panyella, 1951; Pons, 1951a and 1951b; Veciana, 1956), some relevant aspects are worth mentioning. First, Pons and Veciana's publications were based on data collected by the expedition but they had not taken part in it. And second, the fact that the object of the expedition, that is, *what was collected and studied, and how*; the decision of what to study and the mode of studying is a reflection

of a research approach (Edwards, 2000; Edwards and Scorer, 2017):

1. It guides data processing, forming specific views on the relationship between data, objects, and images, generating "new visual experiences or new regimes of truth and documentation" (Achim, 2019, p. 313).

2. All the objects collected by colonial powers were situated at the same ontological level, that is, they were unidentifiable from one another, regardless of whether they were a lion's skin, a stone, a mask, or a human skull (Kisukidi, 2015). This reveals the thinking of colonialism, that is, a brain that meticulously classifies, and ultimately reinvents, objects and living beings (Philippe, 2021).

Finally, we must point out another relevant point: the objects acquired by the expedition were purchased, not stolen or otherwise appropriated, as was unfortunately so often the case after Africa was partitioned by colonial powers after the Berlin Conference of 1885, although the doubt remains as to what extent locals could refuse to let go of objects that might have been symbolically important.

Within this wider framework, images taken during the expedition reflected the scientific, cultural, and political universe that drove expedition members when they took photographs or films.

## ANTHROPOLOGY AND IMAGE DURING THE EXPEDITION

Research on the role played by photography in colonial processes, specifically concerning Spain, is making enormous progress (Gallo and Arbaiza, 2022). In the 1948 expedition, images were to play a prominent part. Graphic representations can be regarded as "labyrinthine connections" (Edwards, 2014), that is, photographs, especially anthropometric ones, expose the close relationship between colonial powers and political worldviews and science, which become especially blatant in colonial environments (vid also Plasencia, 2017; Stehrenberger, 2022).

These "labyrinthine connections" become obvious when we consider that Guineans were, from a legal perspective, a "subject" and not a "citizen" population (Carrasco, 2022, pp. 248-252). The metropolitan power had created political and ideological conditions that allowed Spanish expedition members to carry out their research without obstacle; they could study, document, interview, collect, etc., all individual and collective cultural and biological features of the groups under study.

In this way, measuring, weighting, taking blood, photographing, and filming were tasks designed to establish specific kinds of information that could confirm ideas about native populations developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Aranzadi, 2021; Sá, 2015).

As noted, the expedition was assigned funds to purchase photographic and filmographic material. Following the ideas noted above, along with the collection of anthropometric, serological, and other anatomical data (fingerprints, palmprints):

Front and profile photographs were taken of most of the subjects, several scenes of daily indigenous life [were filmed], the value of which cannot be doubted, and if the result is acceptable, given the lighting conditions prevailing, a long movie will be possible. The scenes included indigenous settlements and houses; the coast; the drying of seeds; the grounding of coffee; the harvesting of peanuts; pottery making and basketry; the preparation of nipa palm; marketing and transport of *nkué*; Pamue wrestling; *cayuco* sailing on the river and *igara* sailing on the sea; Combe crossbowman; and *balele* scenes (Alcobé, 1955, pp. 93 and 95).

What do the images taken in Spanish Guinea in 1948 reflect? Aside from the anthropometric photographs, we must take Santos Zunzunegui's (vid. Limón Serrano, 2021) cue about the other images:

The most important thing is to finish once and for all with the faith that we have deposited in images as a replica of the world; images are not an emanation from a reference (in the traditional discourse about analogic devices) but a privileged mechanism to produce reality, that is, meaning.

In fact, photography acts as: “the imprint of something real, which creates the belief that the image is, in itself, a natural and inevitable phenomenon, the result of a determination that is independent on the individual will and the cultural context” (Del Río, 2021, p. 123).

This guiding principle of photography allows for a more detailed analysis of images, be it from a conceptual point of view – photography equals scientific evidence – or from the perspective of how images were taken. In this way, scientists create knowledge in the process, expanding knowledge to appeal to an informed public (Kjellman, 2016, p. 7).

As such, given the anthropological aim of most images (Ortiz García and Cea Gutiérrez, 2005), the subjects are represented in isolation from their social and cultural but not their natural, context; skull and face are emphasised, facilitating subsequent interpretations that connect biology and culture, that is, endorsing what has been referred to as the *biological nature of culture* (Calvo, 1997b, 2005), which pervades, in one way or another, all these studies about Spanish Guinea: “The usual principles of research, for instance, in Spain, do not apply to Guinea, which is a different environment, totally different people in terms of nature and education” (González Echegaray, 1964, p. 14).

In fact, the interaction of photography, race, and visual perception strongly contributed to hierarchise and underline the *essential* and *racial* aspects of native communities (López Sanz and Sánchez Durá, 2021). In this regard, visual products such as racial atlases played a crucial role in consolidating this process in the West. It has been written that

[...] facial atlas could function as an imperceptible interface between [...] individual subjectivity and racialized



FIGURE 3. Types. Expedition to Spanish Guinea 1948 (Fondo documental MEB).



category, and between everyday colonial recognition and scientific analysis of 'races'. Obscuring the apparatus facilitating such a vision naturalizes the position of a viewer surveying, analyzing, and comparing people of different geographic backgrounds as races (Mak, 2020, p. 327).

As noted, this emphasis on racial features necessarily implied the objectification of human beings, turning them into 'things', which, according to Kisukidi, could be entered into the equation of colonial economies. This 'racial accounting' or 'racial economy' allowed the measuring, calculating, and planning of the type and quantity of food needed for a certain task, as analysed by Bajohr and Löw (2016) for Nazi Germany, another prominent example of the fetishization of human objectification.

In addition, this type of photograph obscured other aspects of the ways of life of the subjects, neglecting a basic tenet of fieldwork, the 'sequence of images' that has the potential to yield more detailed knowledge. In this way, these photographs contributed nothing to the so-called 'ethnography of experience', that is, research that brings the researcher closer to a more precise understanding of the ways of life and worldviews of the individuals and communities under study. Graphic records, in whatever format, can greatly help us to understand the "density of experience" of people (Edwards, 1995, p. 142). In this regard, it must be pointed out that, in all of the IDEA's publications, the graphic record largely betrays this disconnection with the cultural realities of people, as they chiefly consist of images of material culture (Robles Mendoza, 1946) or the classic racial 'types' (Bonelli y Rubio, 1949, p. 187).

In this way, the graphic record of the expedition only confirmed the alleged connection between biology and culture, turning preconceived stereotypes into incontrovertible fact. In any case, it must be stated that, in contrast

with 19<sup>th</sup>-century anthropometric photographs, these were taken in nature, without using neutral backgrounds with scales. This is interesting, because, as the photographs illustrate (Fig. 3), despite the anthropobiological discourse that enveloped them, the pose of the subjects already reveals a different view from that betrayed by classic 19<sup>th</sup>-century anthropometric photographs.

For all of these reasons, it can be argued that the photographs acted as a certificate of authenticity, and contributed to confirming the backward cultural stage of "primitive" or "natural" peoples, in F. Ratzel's terminology (1888).

This, again, confirmed the need for western civilizational and evangelising intervention, with European culture as the universal reference: "Pamues are the only ones in the region to practice some craft [...] they work copper and brass, which they do not produce but harvest from Europeans in the form of old cauldrons" (Pérez de Barradas, 1947, p. 72).

Although the remaining non-anthropobiological photographs have proven impossible to locate, photographs from other expeditions sponsored by the MEB to Guinea (1959) (Fig. 4) are clarifying concerning the context in which they were taken. These images reveal the condescending and paternalistic attitude of Spanish officials – probably health workers – and Guineans dressed European-style vis-à-vis the 'performers', which represent traditional rituals and dances: we may even speak of certain indifference and even glee before the 'western camera'. In any case, the staged nature of the scenes, which confirm cultural stereotype and exoticism, is hard to miss.

## CONCLUSIONS

As noted in the opening paragraphs, this text aimed to answer such questions as: to what extent did science



FIGURE 4. Performances for filming crews, during expeditions to Spanish Guinea 1957 (Fondo documental MEB).



help to consolidate Spanish colonial power in Guinea? What were the scientific parameters followed in the study of Guinean society? Why did the scientific (from the methodological and conceptual perspective) expedition adopt the tenets that it did? What is the distance between 19<sup>th</sup>-century ‘primitive humanity’ and 21<sup>st</sup>-century ‘shared humanity’?

I have tried to answer these questions with a view on the principle that travellers discover that which they already carry with them (Onfray, 2016). In this way, the scientific principles of the 1948 expedition mirrored the political, cultural, social, and scientific context of post-war Spain, for instance, by vindicating Spain’s role in Africa and following a notion of science in which biology and culture walked hand-in-hand. Some central aspects have been emphasised, such as the *biological nature of culture*, the keystone of the expedition’s anthropological doctrine. This principle implied that human beings could be objectified as both cultural and natural beings, just like any other object or piece of data. Objectification was an expression of colonial hierarchies, which allowed racial features to remain one of the pillars of social organisation.

For all of this, it can be argued that the *Expedición Científica a los Territorios Españoles del Golfo de Guinea* of 1948, sponsored by Dirección General de Marruecos y Colonias, is a clear exponent of the scientific and political-colonial worldview that prevailed in post-war Spain, which, among other things, helped to consolidate Spanish colonial power.

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## ARCHIVES CONSULTED

Fondo Documental del Museu Etnològic de Barcelona.

## NOTES

- 1 This revision of colonial pasts includes an important movement for the study and possible repatriation of material culture/art to their original countries. In this sense, a statement by French President Emmanuel Macron in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), on 28 November 2017, about the need to “return African heritage,” is particularly significant. See Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018). *Restituer le patrimoine africain*. Paris: Philippe Rey/Seuil, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics*. Ministère de la Culture. Núm. 2018-26 and [http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr\\_savoy\\_en.pdf](http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf) (consulted 21 Aug. 2022). Complementarily, see Nora Philippe (2021) “Restitution. L’Afrique en quête des chefs d’œuvres.” <https://www.tv5monde.com/programmes/fr/programme-tv-restituer-l-afrique-en-quete-de-ses-chefs-d-oeuvre/125360/>.
- 2 Several factors, including the recognition of so-called ‘fragmented pasts’, have triggered a revision of colonialism. Espe-

cially significant are exhibits like “Slavery” (Rijkmuseum, Amsterdam, 9 June-29 August 2021) and “Human zoos” (African Museum, Tervuren, December 2021-March 2022). The number of publications of the issue has grown exponentially. See, for instance, Josep Maria Fradera. “Eslavitud, servidumbre y usos del pasado.” *El País* (27 April 2022), p. 11 and Josep Playà Maset. “El pasado esclavista de Catalunya.” *La Vanguardia* (22 June 2020), pp. 34-35.

- 3 See the series “Racismo en Europa,” published by *La Vanguardia* in 2020: United Kingdom (Rafael Ramos, 14 June, p. 12); France (Eusebio Val, 15 June, p. 7); Belgium (Jaume Masdeu, 16 June, p. 4); Germany (María-Paz López, 17 June, p. 8); Italy (Anna Bui, 18 June, p. 6); Scandinavia (Núria Vila, 19 June, p. 8); Hungary (Félix Flores, 20 June, p. 4). See also Núria Vila Masclans. “Desterrados del gueto.” *La Vanguardia* (21 June 2020), pp. 16-17.
- 4 See Francesc Peyró. “La victoria de Ota venga. El zoo del Bronx pide perdón 116 años después de exhibir a un pigmeo en una jaula de monos.” *La Vanguardia* (4 August 2020), p. 7.
- 5 For instance, the accumulation of toxins, like chlordecone, in the blood of inhabitants of the former colonies in the French Antilles, which has a direct impact on prostate cancer, is a result of colonial agricultural practices. See Luc Multigner et al. “Chlordecone Exposure and Risk of Prostate Cancer.” *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, vol. 28, n° 21 (20 July 2010), pp. 3457-3462. Another significant example is colonial policy in New Caledonia, where the authorities forced Canacos to destroy their traditional houses, imposing a model of house made with tremolite, a type of asbestos that, in the long run, caused innumerable cases of pleural cancer. See P. Goldberg et al. (1995). “Rôle potentiel de l’exposition environnementale et domestiques à la tremolite dans le cancer de la plèvre en Nouvelle-Calédonie.” *Revue d’épidémiologie et de santé publique*, n° 43, pp. 444-450.
- 6 See Claire Judde de Larivière. “L’historien ne connaît pas la fin de l’histoire.” *Le Monde* (2 de febrero de 2019). [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/02/02/l-historien-ne-connaît-pas-la-fin-de-l-histoire\\_5418359\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/02/02/l-historien-ne-connaît-pas-la-fin-de-l-histoire_5418359_3232.html) (consulted 2 August 2022).
- 7 See “Antropología africanista durante el franquismo: El Instituto Bernardino de Sahagún, 1939-1951” in this volume.
- 8 The items collected over the years were finally deposited in the National Anthropological Museum on 21 February 1984 by the decision of a committee tasked with clearing the bodies attached to the prime minister’s office during Francoism.
- 9 Between 1944 and 1946, the production company Hermic Films undertook substantial fieldwork, taking approximately 5000 photographs and 30 films: some of these were published but had little social impact. See Ortín and Esono Ebalé (2022).
- 10 Vial de Morla (1945) wrote the following: “In this period from 1940 to 1945, Spanish science has contributed invaluable with all its specialities to the study of our Western Africa (Ifni and Sahara). Spain is gaining now exact knowledge of its territories, and this will increase, it appears, the fruit of all this work, and will trigger new scientific studies of various kinds. This is also part of the universal task of studying a continent like Africa, which is called to play a leading role in the world that now begins.”
- 11 Oficio de José Díaz Villegas (Madrid, 13 de marzo de 1948). Fondo documental MEB.
- 12 Carta de August Panyella a Martín Almagro, director del Museo de Arqueología de Barcelona, 8 de julio de 1947. Fondo documental MEB.
- 13 Oficio de Díaz de Villegas, see note 11.
- 14 Ibidem.
- 15 It must be pointed out that these rose considerably because the members of the zoological group remained in Guinea a few extra weeks.
- 16 See González (2009). <https://www.publico.es/actualidad/depression-autarquia-1.html> (consulted 1 Aug. 2022).
- 17 This approach to the study of the population groups in the colony continued during the early decades of the existence of the

- MEB: the main aim was to understand the features of cultural evolution: "... they decided to suggest a stratigraphic excavation to scientifically establish the relative chronology, the cultural stages developed by the ancient inhabitants, their likely differences between them, and their relationship with the Bubis in the Island [Fernando Poo]" (Panyella and Sabater Pi, 1958).
- 18 Both presented a paper at the Sociology International Conference held in Rome in September 1950. See Alcobé and Panyella, 1951.
  - 19 On 31 January 1949, Alcobé, as director of the expedition, and Francisco Pardillo, director of Instituto de Ciencias Naturales, Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, agreed for the materials collected to be deposited at the MEB, waiting for the decision of the Dirección General de Marruecos y Colonias. Afterwards, some of these materials were relocated to the African Museum and, when this museum closed, to the National Anthropology Museum (Fondo documental MEB).
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