

USES OF THE ARCHIVE IN SPANISH POST-COLONIAL DOCUMENTARIES*

MIGUEL FERNÁNDEZ LABAYEN

ELENA OROZ

I. COLONIAL IMAGINARIES, ARCHIVES AND POST-COLONIAL DOCUMENTARIES IN SPAIN

Although Spanish colonialism continued right up to the final third of the 20th century, Spain's memory of its colonial past is practically non-existent, particularly in relation to its last outposts in Equatorial Guinea (until 1968) and North Africa (until 1975). In the specific case of cinema, the volume and substance of cultural representations of different colonial regions, historical periods and political developments in metropolitan Spain has been quite uneven. For example, North Africa played a key role in the discourses that triggered the regeneration of the *raza española* (the "Spanish race") during the early 20th century, the Spanish Civil War, and the Franco dictatorship (García Carrión, 2016; Martín-Márquez, 2011), resulting in a visual and cinematic culture that served as a vehicle for nationalist discourses and racial and

gender stereotypes more familiar to the public than those related to Spanish Guinea (Ortega, 2001; Elena, 2010; Martín-Márquez, 2011).

In the contemporary post-colonial context, the country's colonial legacy in Africa has been explored in only a handful of recent Spanish films. It is both significant and indicative that the groundbreaking film *Black Island* (*Lejos de África*, Cecilia Bartolomé, 1996) was considered a difficult work to analyse, due not only to its complex production and development process but to its status as a kind of orphan piece, making it hard to place in a tradition that it could "dialogue with, break away from, challenge or resist", existing in a territory "unconquered by both the popular imagination and the more prominent academic and cultural discourses" (Ortega, 2001: 87-88).

Two decades later, in a socio-political context in which Spanish colonialism is still absent from school curricula and only just beginning to creep into public debates, there is an increasing number

of audiovisual productions dealing with the colonial legacy in Africa, although some of these take positions aligned with neo-colonial perspectives (Santamaría Colmenero, 2018). Series such as *The Time in Between* (*El tiempo entre costuras*, Antena 3, 2013-2014) and films such as *Palm Trees in the Snow* (*Palmeras en la nieve*, Fernando González Molina, 2015), adapted from the novels of the same name by María Dueñas and Luz Gabás, respectively, and animated documentaries like *One Day I Saw 10,000 Elephants* (*Un día vi 10.000 elefantes*, Alex Guimerà, Juan Pajares, 2015) constitute a selection of stories that Sara Santamaría Colmenero argues “draw on narrative strategies used previously in novels and films about the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship, with the aim of restoring the public memory of former colonists, justifying their participation in the colonial system and asserting their historical legitimacy” (2018: 447).

In contrast with these offerings imbued with nostalgia and exoticism, in the realm of non-fiction we can find numerous productions that offer a less favourable view of Spanish rule in Guinea, Morocco and the Sahara. These include *Memoria Negra* [Black Memory] (Xavier Montanyà, 2006), *Western Sahara* (Left Hand Rotation, 2013), *El ojo imperativo* [The Imperative Eye] (María Ruido, 2015), *The Impossible Cities* (Las ciudades imposibles, Chus Domínguez, 2018), *Manoliño Nguema* (Antonio Grunfeld Rius, 2019), the webdoc *Provincia 53* (Laura Casielles, 2020) and *Memorias de ultramar* [Overseas Memories] (Carmen Bellas, Alberto Berzosa, 2021), although this is by no means an exhaustive list. Others that could be added include the exhibitions commissioned by Juan Guardiola, such as *Colonia apócrifa* [Apocryphal Colony] (2015) and *Provincia 53. Arte, territorio y descolonización del Sáhara Occidental* [Province 53: Art, Territory and the Decolonisation of Western Sahara] (2018), which featured contemporary artistic videos alongside propaganda films.

This boom, associated with the progressive reception and acceptance of post-colonial criticism

THE ARCHIVES, IN THE FORM OF MEMOIRS, ARE PRESENTED AS A MEANS OF ALMOST COMPLETELY TRANSPARENT ACCESS TO THE PAST

in the arts, has only just begun to have an impact on scholarly discussion of the contemporary documentary in Spain (Martin-Márquez, 2011; Cerdán & Fernández Labayen, 2013; Guardiola, 2017). These studies have focused on independent and/or artistic non-fiction and have helped to anchor the theoretical discussion dealing with these practices and to begin mapping recent documentary production that could be described as post-colonial. Specifically, Guardiola (2017) analyses a selection of works associated with video art that focus on the Latin American context, addressing issues of post-colonial historiography, epistemology, subjectivity and geography.

The aim of this article is to contribute to this field of study with the analysis of three recent documentaries that focus on the asymmetries arising from imperialist logic to examine personal, scientific and/or institutional colonial contexts from a perspective close to post-colonial criticism of the archive. The films analysed here are *África 815* (Pilar Monsell, 2014), a family documentary exploring Orientalist imaginaries associated with Western Sahara; *On the Names of the Goats* (*De los nombres de las cabras*, Silvia Navarro, Miguel G. Morales, 2019), an essay film about the projections of the colonial imaginary on the Canary Islands; and *A Storm Was Coming* (*Anunciaron tormenta*, Javier Fernández Vázquez, 2020), a historiographical study of colonial domination over the Bubi people in Equatorial Guinea. These films all belong to the aforementioned list of documentaries that tie in with post-colonial theory¹ and their distribution has occupied an interstitial space between independent documentary circuits and museums (Guardiola, 2017). This is certainly

the case of *África 815*, which was subsequently adapted for exhibition at the Virreina Centre de la Imatge in Barcelona under the title *África 815: Paraíso perdido* [Africa 815: Paradise Lost] (2017), while *On the Names of the Goats* is a successor to a video installation titled *Torrente de piedra quemada* [Torrent of Burnt Stone] (2017), which also drew on the film and audio archives of the Canarian anthropologist Diego Cuscoy.

In theoretical terms, this study adopts the concise definition of post-colonial cinema proposed by Sandra Ponzanesi (2017), as a conceptual space that opens up occluded frames and proposes an engagement with the visual that is de-colonised, becoming a mode of relational representation to make room for what are often repressed, omitted or unofficial histories, both of nations and of subaltern communities or groups. On the other hand, the archive is conceptualised here in line with contemporary approaches inspired by the “archival turn”, which understand colonial archives as techno-social devices that at once produce and exclude cultural facts and identities (Stoler, 2002, 2009). Based on the foundational work of Michel Foucault (2002) and Jacques Derrida (1995), these perspectives take the archive as a concept that not only regulates historical discourses and establishes epistemic hierarchies, but also houses “records of uncertainty” (Stoler, 2009) about their own status. In short, these perspectives highlight the fact that the colonial archive constitutes a conceptually privileged space for subversive readings that can shed light on the gaps in history, give them form, and offer possible opposing views (Burton, 2006; Stoler, 2002 and 2009; Amad, 2010).

With this conceptual framework, the analysis offered here focuses on the creative uses of the archive that are visible in the films—their arrangement and conversion into filmic material—and on the representations of colonial otherness present in the footage used, based on persistent colonial tropes intended to naturalise racial, national and gender differences (Shohat, 1991). These readings

also facilitate the exploration of what Paula Amad (2013) calls “the history of colonial structures of seeing” as a way of understanding and questioning violent formulas of domination and their visual expression in cinema and photography.

2. *ÁFRICA 815: THE OTHER IN THE FAMILY ARCHIVE*

Pilar Monsell’s first feature film, *África 815*, explores the life of her father, Manuel Monsell, focusing on his homosexual relationships, chiefly with Maghrebi men during his military service in the Sahara in 1964. The director alternates interviews with her father at his seaside apartment in Málaga with archive material consisting of Manuel’s memoirs, family albums, snapshots stored in boxes and Super-8 films of his parent’s travels. As the filmmaker herself describes it, the film functions as “a genealogy of a family’s colonial romanticism” (personal interview, 2 November 2021), taking an approach to her father’s past as a formula for making sense of his decisions.

The film begins with a prologue showing moving images of the sea, while Monsell tells his daughter about a dream he had about the destruction of Barcelona, the city where she lives. This is followed by some Super-8 footage of a seagull flying, of a young Manuel in a swimsuit on the beach with one of his children in his arms, and of Manuel sleeping in his bed in Málaga. His memoirs are then presented in a frontal view on screen (Figure 1), as an elaborately bound book bearing his name and the title of the text: *My Memoirs. Volume II, 1957-1976. La vie en rose*. Next, we see the director’s hands leafing through the book, passing over the copyright registration certificate, the table of contents, and a few other pages. This image fades to black and we hear Monsell herself reading in a voice-over: “I joined the army on the 5th of March 1964: the day of my liberation.” At the end of this sentence, a photo of a 27-year-old Manuel appears, marching as the first in a long



Figure 1. Visualisation of father's memoirs in *África 815*

line of Spanish soldiers in the desert. The voice-over continues to discuss Manuel's experience of "liberation": "My number was 815; my destination: El Aaiún, Sahara. I was overjoyed because all my wishes had come true: to go as far away as possible from Madrid and from home, to see the African continent and make use of my medical degree for the first time."

In these first minutes there is a careful insertion and arrangement of personal archives and, by extension, archives of the Monsell family. The archives, in the form of memoirs, are presented as a means of almost completely transparent access to the past. It is a past that functions as a continuous present for the audience, who gradually become aware of Manuel's other desires: to be surrounded by attractive young men and be able to engage in sexual relations with them. In this return to a formative period and to his everyday experiences in Africa, the film draws us into Monsell's memories, which give meaning to his love life, professional life, and of course, family life. By playing this way with the written and visual texts from Manuel's past and his statements in the present, we come to see how he made use of his professional authority (physician), his greater life experience (27 years old when he arrived in the Sahara, some six years older than most of his companions) and his hegemonic racial and social

position (white and wealthy, compared to the lower-class Moroccan youths he mixed with) to exploit this colonial destination for sexual purposes.

The function of the archive here is that identified by Derrida (1995: 36): "The archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. [...] It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow." It is with this objective that Monsell wrote, recorded, bound and distributed his various volumes of memoirs, in the

hope, as he states in the dedication in Volume 3, that his three children would read them. This future dimension of the archive is documented by the director, who organises this legacy as a kind of personal response to the family breakdown described in her father's diaries.

At the same time, through a meticulous selection of materials, the film involves us in Manuel's experiences, which function as surprising revelations for the viewer, a series of sexual and family histories that appeal for our response. The intention of this appeal, operating through the director's reading of excerpts from the memoirs, is not so that we might pass judgement on his life, but to position us as an audience sympathetic to a man who on several occasions recognises his own failure. This sensation is accentuated all the more by the contrast between the wanderings and experiences of the young Manuel, with an identity in constant physical and emotional flux—in his travels around Africa, but also when with his wife—and the sedentary existence of Manuel today, now old and practically immobile in his seaside home.

Unsurprisingly, previous studies of the film have identified the formal and narrative strategies developed by the filmmaker as key to the construction of the tension between proximity and distance for her father and the issues explored

(Oroz, 2017; Thomas, 2020). The director operates as an intermediary for the spectator and as a character, albeit a supporting one, in Manuel's Orientalist queer story. As its synopsis suggests, the film is constructed around Pilar's encounter with "the paradise lost to which he will attempt to return" (Monsell, 2015). The colonial trope of the paradise lost is reinforced by the air of reverie that pervades the film, from the dreams of the old Manuel that begin and end the film to the fanciful nature of his life goals. Manuel's liberation in the Sahara, where he gives free rein to his homosexual passions, ties in with what José Esteban Muñoz (2009), in his reconsideration of post-Stonewall queering processes since the late 1960s, would describe as a "utopian feeling" and "futurity" generated by queerness. It is tempting to read Manuel's African period as a collective sexual explosion, a kind of homoerotic celebration outside the patriarchal heterosexuality of Francoism, although culturally and socially tolerated within certain expressive limits (Martin-Márquez, 2011). However, Manuel's subsequent cloistered life upends this possibility and confines it to the space of individual utopia, as a possible example of the breakdown of the homosexual dream and of Spanish-African coexistence in the body of the Spanish nation.

It is in these terms that Gustau Nerín (2017) has criticised the film for naturalising the position of "colonial and economic domination" of the protagonist, a victim of the homophobic Spanish establishment, while "rendering the submission of the Saharans invisible." This reading questions the film's critical capacity as a post-colonial artefact. In other words, in this story about the family institution, it is important to evaluate the place given to those *other* subjects: the friends and lovers in whom the colonial tensions and dynamics were perpetuated.

On the narrative level, as noted above, the documentary plays with Manuel's transnational odyssey, beginning in 1964 with his wild youthful passions, continuing in the 1970s with the

silent, distanced trips he made with his wife, and culminating in the mutual exploitation and disappointment with his Maghrebi lovers in the 1980s, as a prelude to his solitude and progressive physical decline. In filmic terms, this transnational mobility is refilmed by Pilar Monsell by capturing and reframing images of her father. In these snapshots—showing Manuel posing and smiling, confident, surrounded by colleagues, patients and friends—we find an extension of colonial visual practices that place Moroccan boys in a scene with camels, sand dunes and palm trees serving as an exotic background (Figure 2). As Sarah Thomas (2020) suggests in her analysis of the film, the men accompanying Manuel look at the camera in a way that seems to challenge the spectator. This constitutes an echo of what Paula Amad calls "visual riposte", referring to the visual response of the colonised bodies captured by Monsell's cameras, embodying an "ethical intent to return, or at least to interrogate, the gaze" (2013: 52). The attention that the filmmaker gives to these moments exposes the plurality of gazes, ranging from Manuel's blissful happiness to the less enthusiastic and more guarded expressions of the young men who embrace him. This triangulation of gazes—photographed subjects, camera and spectators—gives rise to a unique process of recognition that contains a high level of estrangement literally generated by what Sara Ahmed (2000) calls "the encounter with the stranger" (or foreigner). These encounters, which as Ahmed notes never occur on equal or harmonious terms, unleash a series of tensions beginning with sexual identity (Manuel's) and family identity (Pilar and Manuel's) and ending with the economic, romantic and racial conflicts arising from Manuel's asymmetrical social and emotional relationships with his Maghrebi lovers. It is in this sense that the film functions as a post-colonial documentary and invites us to reflect on how colonialism operates, its permeability and complexity when articulating any stable identity based on the colonial



Figure 2. Asymmetries of the colonial gaze in *África 815*

project. As Ahmed suggests, “we need to ask how contemporary modes of proximity reopen prior histories of encounter” (2000: 13). In this sense, the work on the family archive in *África 815* facilitates a reassessment of the coding and construction of these boundaries between personal, family and stranger that are founded on Orientalist tropes of colonial otherness.

3. ON THE NAMES OF THE GOATS: MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH OTHERNESS

On the Names of the Goats is a documentary constructed exclusively on the basis of film footage, photographs and audio recordings of various kinds, compiled over two years through a laborious search for colonial images associated with the Canary Islands in Spanish and international private and public archives. While in the context of colonial encounters Monsell explores visual technologies primarily in order to problematise subjectivity from an intersectional perspective, Navarro and Morales stress the role they play in the construction of a “specular antagonism” (Amad, 2013: 50). The film juxtaposes audio and visual recordings without clearly identifying sources or dates, offering a multi-layered story that somewhat cryptically expresses a wide range of discourses

on Canarian cultural identity—its consolidations and resignifications—based on the prevailing colonial logic in political and scientific discourse.

The unifying theme is the audio and visual recordings taken by the archaeologist and anthropologist Diego Cuscoy (1907-1987), whose studies of the Canary Islands’ Indigenous Guanche people and rural society had a huge impact on the archipelago’s collective imaginary (Gil Hernández, 2021). As Silvia Navarro points out (personal interview, 17 November 2021), Cuscoy’s research was immersed in a complex discourse marked by fantasies about the primitive Other. In his first audio recording, he characterises himself as a kind of adventurer-explorer, an image that inevitably evokes the idea of the bearer of civilisation and truth (Fanon, 1967: 188). While we see shots of his team exploring caves, he tells us in a voice-over:

For me, archaeology has never been an end but a means. What has concerned me is the human experience of this man who preceded us. The pre-Hispanic past of the Canary Islands seemed enthralling to me [...]. It is about bringing two worlds face to face: the world of the Conquistadors and the world of the Aborigines.

This disjunction between Indigenous and coloniser has already been hinted at in the opening sequence, which suggests a continuum between colonialism and Cuscoy’s scientific praxis, as he describes his purpose as being to “demonstrate the powerful force of the ways of life of the Guanches and how they resisted the pressure of other ways that were strange to them” (Gil Hernández, 2021: 232). The film begins with a series of black-and-white shots taken from the sea that highlight the isolated nature of the island and its rugged terrain. This is followed by titles from a news program alternating with shots from a fiction film about the conquest of the Americas. While the images evoke the colonial trope of a *terra incognita*, the intertitles in English point out how the conquest of what had once been virgin territory resulted in a radical transformation in the name of progress, where

the ancient dwellings of the Guanches (the caves) were replaced with architectural constructions.

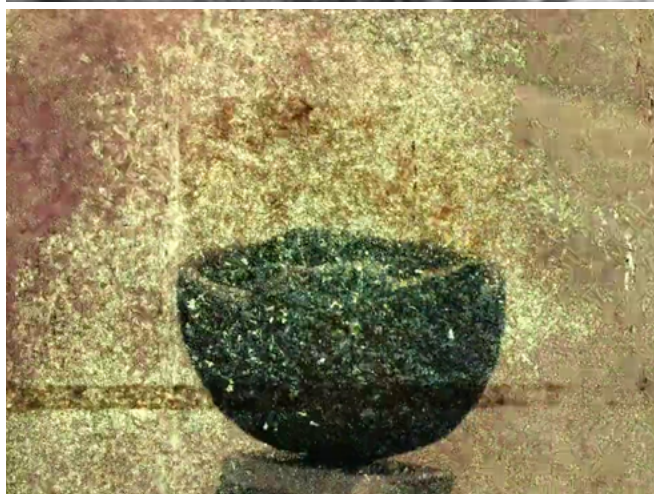
Cuscoy's interviews and his choice of informants—mostly goatherds, an occupation invariably associated with the image of the Guanche—reflect the exoticism that the anthropologist Fernando Estévez González (2011) suggests has characterised ethnographic approaches to the archipelago: "Since the Conquest, the numerous travellers who have come to the islands, upon finding nothing appealing in the 'living' and 'real' Canaries, have quenched their thirst for the exotic with the 'dead' and 'imagined' Aborigines" (Estévez González, 2011: 151). Cuscoy's audio recordings convey some vagueness and inconsistency in the contemporary goatherds' responses to questions about the diet, religious beliefs and funeral rites of the Guanches. However, as the film suggests, it is the very same data collection techniques—interviews and visual documentation of customs, sometimes performed specifically for the camera²—that produce a kind of *animation* or *updating* of the object/subject of study, so that the goatherds at once confirm and become a form of surviving primitive otherness in the modern world. Illustrative in this sense are the introductions/classifications that Cuscoy offers of his interviewees, emphasising their physiognomy and character, or their tools and larders located in caves. In consonance with recent observations by Roberto Gil Hernández about the Guanche imaginary, the film suggests that they do not exist but "persist in the form of feelings that are transferred between bodies and objects that still evoke their memory" (2021: 223).

Similarly, the compiled and remixed visual archives, which presumably cover a period from 1920 through to the 1970s, document goatherds and peasants of both sexes carrying out their everyday tasks, as well as objects that evoke the memory of their *ancestors*, found in archaeological excavations (ceramics, mummies and skulls) and subsequently catalogued and exhibited. The

phantasmal quality of these vestiges is underscored by the sporadic insertion of decaying film footage (Figure 3) and an electronic soundtrack that adds a sense of eeriness to the archival material.

The archaeological imaginary is foregrounded after another of Cuscoy's monologues about the impact that the arrival of Sabino Berthelot (1794-1880) had on the ethnographic study of the Canary Islands, after the "discovery of Cro-Magnon man in 1868 and the observation of the similarity between Cro-Magnons and the Guanches." Indeed, as Estévez González (2011) points out, it was thanks to his work that Canarian ethnography was founded on raciology and the supposed advances of craniometric techniques, thereby adopting the teleological, racial and national principles of modernity. As an ironic comment, the film includes an interview Cuscoy conducted with a goatherd whom he asks to list the names they use to classify different types of goats (hence the film's title), a taxonomy that proves amusing for its precision and length. Superimposed over the list is a series of frontal shots of goatherds and banana pickers captured by a voyeuristic camera, inviting us to decode their physiognomy in an echo of a previous shot (Figure 4) accompanied by a voice-over of an announcer in an old Spanish newsreel asserting that "among these women [female workers] we can see good examples of the primitive race." This sequence not only exemplifies how the visual representation of racial and colonial Others was defined by a logic drawn from zoology (Amad, 2013; Burton & Mawami, 2020), but also (like Monsell's film) offers a series of "visual responses" characteristic of post-colonial intellectual and artistic approaches to such archives, concerned with identifying moments when the subjects consciously and defiantly return or rebuff the colonial gaze, which have been interpreted as expressions of subaltern scopical agency (Amad, 2013: 56).

As discussed above, this documentary presents the Guanches as a colonial trope based on



Above. Figure 3. Phantasmal quality of Guanche remains in *On the Names of the Goats*

Below. Figure 4. Racial taxonomies in *On the Names of the Goats*

the complex positioning of the archipelago in the early period of Spanish/European colonialism in the 15th century and its consolidation in the 19th century thanks to anthropology. The final pillar in this articulation of colonialism would be the Franco dictatorship's "*Segunda Conquista de Canarias*", a "second conquest" based on increased economic and political intervention by the Spanish State, cultural standardisation and a revival of the pre-colonial past for the purposes of Spanish ultranationalism (Gil Hernández, 2021). The film includes audio recordings of the dictatorship's first propaganda material, which, founded on the Falangist principle of a destiny united by a global

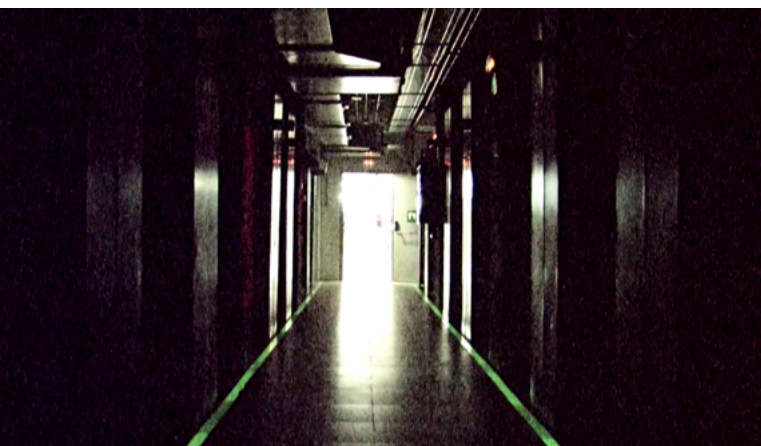
mission, depicts a singular vision of the nation's past by positioning the archipelago as an intersection between the African continent and the Americas on the basis of its crops:

Tomatoes and bananas, red and yellow, are the Spanish flag on the islands. The Canarian tomato brought by our Conquistadors from the Americas [...]. Cochineal provided by our African empire.

Through this propaganda presented in its final section, the film renders explicit the connotations of gender typical of imperialist rhetoric (Shohat, 1991), rife with metaphors such as the *fertility* of the occupied land thanks to the heroic and patriotic intervention of the Spanish, and of course the *spiritual mission* of Spanish expansionism based on repeated references to the Virgin of Candelaria, embraced as a patron by the obscure, polysemic *primitive* Guanches regardless of the obvious contradictions with other deities. While at the beginning of the film Cuscoy is introduced emerging from a cave (presumably unveiling the enigmas of the mysterious native), the final shot shows him entering another grotto, hinting at the uncertain and specular nature of his project. At the same time, the filmmakers expose the colonial archive—anchored here at the intersections between anthropology, popular culture and nationalism—as a space that can be challenged (Stoler, 2009), while also providing evidence, paraphrasing Ella Shohat (1991), of the implicitly archaeological function of visual technologies for deciphering buried civilisations.

4. A STORM WAS COMING: BIAS OF THE ARCHIVE AND ORAL COUNTER-MEMORY

Our final object of study is *A Storm Was Coming*, a film that arose out of Javier Fernández Vázquez's interest in visual anthropology and historical memory in Spain (Maldonado, 2020). The latter is a topic he had explored previously in his films as part of the Los Hijos collective, together with Natalia Marín and Luis López Carrasco, such as



Figures 5 and 6. Estrangement effects of the archive in *A Storm Was Coming*

Los Materiales [The Materials] (2009), a reflexive documentary that depicts the futile attempts of filmmakers to collect definitive memories of the Spanish Civil War (Cerdán, Fernández Labayen, 2017) and *Enero, 2012 o la apoteosis de Isabel la Católica* [January 2012 or the Apotheosis of Isabella the Catholic Queen] (2012), a film included in Guardiola's study mapping post-colonial cinema in Spanish (Guardiola, 2017). The collective would return to the theme of Spanish colonialism in *Árboles* [Trees] (2013), which recounts legends of resistance by the Bubi people, as well as assimilation measures in the form of missions, prisons, and the construction of cities.

Fernández Vázquez's first feature film on his own interrogates Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea, a process involving a policy of segregation that began in the second half of the 19th century and came to an end upon independence in 1968. The film focuses on a paradigmatic episode in Spain's violent repression of the Bubi people (García Cantús, 2008; Siale Djangany, 2016) on the island of Fernando Poo (now Bioko): the capture and death, under suspicious circumstances, of King Esáasi Eweera (1899-1904) due to his refusal to submit to Spanish authority. After an introduction that describes the use of force by Claretian missionaries in 1882—carried out by the *krumanes* (African labourers in Spain's service)—

to get the Bubi to join the mission, we are shown a series of photos from the General Archives of the Administration, carefully composed to give particular emphasis to the symmetry of the space, its labyrinthine nature and the vast quantity of documents it holds. A post-production effect has added sound to the image of a passageway (Figure 5), giving the whole institution a spectral quality: the archives as the structure of the modern-colonial State. A slow fade-in from white reveals a dossier titled "File 59, Detention and Death of Bokuto Sas" containing the official documentation of the case. This visual effect will be repeated every time we are shown archive photographs of the scenes of the case (Figure 6), such as the mission in Concepción or the hospital and dungeon at the port of Malabo, which are gradually superimposed over images of them today, hinting at the oblivion that casts a shadow over this episode of history and, by extension, over Spanish colonialism in general.

With these manipulations, as simple as they are effective, the shots establish an approach to historical documents in line with the aforementioned post-colonial perspective as described by Stoler (2009), applied precisely to the bureaucratic archives of the colonial State. As Stoler suggests, any examination of the complex government technologies inscribed in the archive requires a consideration of the biased nature of the records,

identifying the possibilities of enunciation, the endorsement of certain narratives, the repetition of testimonies along the chain of command and the authorities that validate the production of the archive itself (Stoler, 2009: 21). In short, as Foucault (2002) would point out, it requires decoding the system for what can be expressed.

Whenever the file is presented, its content is recited word-for-word by different Spanish actors, recorded in a studio on the director's instructions. Each actor gives a voice to one of the colonial authorities who prepared the reports: the Civil Guard, the governor, the court official for the Spanish Territories, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in an effort to clarify the circumstances of Eweera's death and the presumable discontent of the Bubi. These reports, as Siale Djangany (2016: 181) argues, express a "rhetoric of dissimulation and the lyricism of bad taste" exhibited by the Spanish authorities on the island as a prerequisite for their impunity. Fernández Vázquez has suggested that these documents can be read as "the script for the cover-up of a crime" (Maldonado, 2020). The film exposes the contradictions between the testimonies, the invalidation of one authority to the benefit of another, and the absence of key witnesses, such as the African corporal of the Civil Guard who arrested Eweera. What Stoler calls the "hierarchy of credibility" (2009: 23) is constructed here on the basis of absences, inconsistencies and misrepresentations aimed at protecting the political and religious authorities, concealing the violence and the selective, punitive extermination of the Bubi.

Towards the end, a title informs us of a direct consequence of this episode: the creation of the Organic Statute of the Local Administration (1904), establishing that "the natives may be required to work for the public administration." This would be just one clause in a new law that established the *Patronato de Indígenas* to manage the workforce, placing the natives under the protection and guidance of the Claretian Missions

(García Cantús, 2008). While the prologue already foreshadowed the prominent role played by the Claretians in the assimilation of the Bubi (through religious submission in order to integrate them into the system of production), the inclusion of an excerpt from the Hermic Films production *Una cruz en la selva* [A Cross in the Jungle] (Manuel Hernández Sanjuán, 1946) reinforces this idea, with the pompous voice-over describing the missionaries as "the vanguard of our spiritual empire in the world."

In addition to examining the production of the archives and their effects, *A Storm Was Coming* contrasts the reading of the files against sequences that document the oral memory of the Bubi people. The film includes the agreement reached with two of the participants: the filmmaker can record their voices, but not their images; instead, he uses shots of the locations where the main events took place. This collage of overlapping memories—which at times, we can infer, are recalled collectively—undermines the colonial narrative. The recount is filled with details that call into question the official version, underscoring the punitive nature of the king's death and the consequences of a repression whose violence intensified in 1910 (García Cantús, 2008): a policy of silence and erasure. The absence of images of the interviewees extends to a meticulous use of photographic archives characteristic of post-colonial readings, which simultaneously affirm and deny the colonial gaze for the contemporary audience. In this way, the photographs documenting the subjugation of the population are shown for only a few frames before suddenly fading to black. If, as Amad ultimately suggests (2013: 64), the "returned gaze" is the effect of certain modes of seeing by a historically and/or racially distanced spectator, the director undermines this mitigating possibility that the archive could offer.

In short, while revealing how the Spanish colonial State, which at the beginning of the 20th century still had to be propped up, effectively in-

formed personal memories, this film presents itself as an archive of alternative oral testimonies that could serve to assert future collective narratives. Indeed, Fernández has identified symbolic reparation as an objective of his project (Maldonado, 2020), expressed in a final gesture of transmission of a subaltern memory that has hitherto been denied: the philologist Justo Bolekia, a participant in the collective storytelling, together with his daughter, both looking at the camera and reading a poem written in Bubi that recounts an alternative version of Eweera's death.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the geographical and historical diversity of the Spanish imperialist narratives explored in the films analysed here, all share a concern with presenting colonial archives—private, scientific or institutional—as complex technologies of power, subjugation and exclusion. These films reveal the painful histories resulting from colonial modernity: the Orientalist imaginary as a persistent feature of coloniality, the epistemic violence that characterises traditional ethnography, and the conquest and repression of local cultures.

As documentaries classified here as post-colonial, their approach to the archive involves the simultaneous consideration of documents as sources and as objects, as “epistemological experiments” that reveal and conceal illegitimate facts and knowledge (Stoler, 2009: 87). In exploring this duality, the films identify a series of traditional colonial tropes—paradise lost, *terra incognita*, the primitive savage—constructed on the basis of intractable intersections between race, gender and sexuality, and expose their visual sources by seeking signs of resistance against the colonial gaze that are not always possible. On the other hand, all three films shed light on the elisions, misrepresentations and contradictions present in the archives to show how official, national and personal histories are necessarily founded on these

inconsistencies (Burton, 2006: 2) in their articulation of a stable identity nevertheless based on unresolved conflicts. Rather than documenting the past, these films stress how processes of knowledge transfer mediated by the archive have both personal and social echoes in the present.

These approaches to the archive—resulting from research carried out over more than two years—could also be thought of as “self-conscious ethnographies” (Burton, 2006: 6) that inscribe their encounter with the archive onto the filmic text as an experience that is socio-political, but also physical and emotional. All three films expose the materiality of the documents and/or their location as an inextricable feature of the history that the archive may tell. At the same time, their strategies of enunciation/conversion—specifically, of written and/or oral records—hint at a position that is *a priori* distanced yet open to complex emotional inflections. While this is clear in Monsell's reading of her father's memoirs and in Cuscoy's own reflexive observations on his scientific praxis, it is also discernible in the disruptions introduced by Fernández in his orchestration of the voices representing the colonial authorities.

The heterogeneity and reflexivity of these films reverse the colonial imaginary's occlusion or its neo-colonial reactivation in Spain, participating in an expansion of the archive through a post-colonial gaze—entailing the revelation of sources that were hitherto practically unknown—to trigger debates in the present about race, sexuality, national identity and political memory whose roots can be traced back to violent colonial encounters. ■

NOTES

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- 1 In addition, the three films are directed by filmmakers of the same generation, all having been born in the early years of the Spanish transition to democracy: 1978 (Morales), 1979 (Monsell), 1980 (Fernández) and 1986 (Navarro). Their production processes therefore share an interest in the construction of memory and colonial history mentioned above.
 - 2 This refers particularly to a recording taken by Cuscoy of a woman in a patio making and painting an earthenware jar *for the camera*, although the creation process shown is not actually the traditional method (personal interview with Silvia Navarro, 17 November 2021).

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USES OF THE ARCHIVE IN SPANISH POST-COLONIAL DOCUMENTARIES

Abstract

This article analyses a series of recent documentaries articulated from archival material linked to Spanish colonial processes and imaginaries in the Sahara, Equatorial Guinea and the Canary Islands, contributing to the limited debates on Spanish postcolonial documentary. Specifically, it focuses on *Africa 815* (Pilar Monsell, 2014), *De los nombres de las cabras* (Silvia Navarro Martín and Miguel G. Morales, 2019) and *Anunciaron tormenta* (Javier Fernández Vázquez, 2020). This research examines the creative approach to various archives and colonial tropes to address how these documentaries interrogate history and the imperialist structures of vision and knowledge. Within this history, these films take institutional and personal documents as epistemological experiments (Stoler, 2009), in which colonial power relations that produce facts, taxonomies and cultural identities are inscribed.

Key words

Postcolonial documentary; Archive; Colonialism; Postcolonial studies; Spanish cinema; Equatorial Guinea; Canary Islands; Sahara.

Authors

Miguel Fernández Labayen (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, 1976) is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Carlos III University of Madrid and member of the Tecmerin research group and the University Institute of Spanish Cinema at the same university. He has written more than fifty chapters and academic articles, and his areas of research are Spanish cinema, documentary and experimental cinema from a transnational perspective. He is co-director of the collection «Ibero-American Screens/Pantallas Iberoamericanas» of the Peter Lang publishing house. Contact: mflabaye@hum.uc3m.es

Elena Oroz (Soria, 1978) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Carlos III University of Madrid and member of the Tecmerin research group. Author of more than 20 book chapters and academic articles, her areas of study are documentary, Spanish cinema and gender studies. Contact: elortega@hum.uc3m.es

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USOS DEL ARCHIVO EN EL DOCUMENTAL POSTCOLONIAL ESPAÑOL

Resumen

Este artículo analiza una serie de documentales recientes articulados a partir de material de archivo vinculado a los procesos e imaginarios coloniales españoles en el Sáhara, Guinea Ecuatorial y Canarias. En concreto, se centra en *África 815* (Pilar Monsell, 2014), *De los nombres de las cabras* (Silvia Navarro Martín, Miguel G. Morales, 2019) y *Anunciaron tormenta* (Javier Fernández Vázquez, 2020). Con el ánimo de contribuir a los escasos debates sobre el documental postcolonial español, esta investigación examina la aproximación creativa a diversos archivos y los tropos coloniales presentes en los mismos, para dirimir cómo estos documentales se interrogan por la historia y las estructuras imperialistas de la visión y el conocimiento. Dentro de esta historia, estos films toman los documentos institucionales y personales como experimentos epistemológicos (Stoler, 2009), en los que se inscriben relaciones de poder coloniales que producen hechos, taxonomías e identidades culturales.

Palabras clave

Documental postcolonial; archivo; colonialismo; estudios postcoloniales; cine español; Guinea Ecuatorial; Canarias; Sáhara.

Autores

Miguel Fernández Labayen (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, 1976) es profesor titular del departamento de Comunicación de la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid y miembro del grupo de investigación Tecmerin y del Instituto Universitario del Cine Español de la misma universidad. Sus áreas de investigación son el cine español, el documental y el cine experimental desde una perspectiva transnacional. Codirige la colección «Ibero-American Screens/Pantallas Iberoamericanas» de la editorial Peter Lang. Contacto: mflabaye@hum.uc3m.es

Elena Oroz (Soria, 1978) es profesora ayudante doctora en el departamento de Comunicación de la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid y miembro del grupo de investigación Tecmerin. Es autora de una veintena de capítulos de libro y artículos científicos, sus áreas de investigación son el cine documental, el cine español y los estudios de género. Contacto: elortega@hum.uc3m.es

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