

A CENTRAL PERIPHERY: CATALAN SETTLERS AND THE ECONOMY OF SPANISH GUINEA (1778-1968)

UNA PERIFERIA CENTRAL: COLONOS CATALANES Y LA ECONOMÍA DE LA GUINEA ESPAÑOLA (1778-1968)

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RESUMEN: En este artículo presentamos un análisis de un grupo de colonos europeos muy poco estudiados por la historiografía, los catalanes que emigraron a la Guinea Española (actual Guinea Ecuatorial). Destacamos como, pese a su limitada implicación en la administración del territorio, los catalanes fueron determinantes en la evolución económica del mismo. A través de un lobby constante y sistemático tanto en Guinea como en Madrid, individuos, compañías e instituciones catalanas consiguieron influir en las políticas coloniales del gobierno español y controlar la producción y exportación del principal producto guineano, el cacao. Durante un largo período, Barcelona fue la capital de un pequeño imperio en el África Ecuatorial, y una minoría nacional y cultural en la metrópoli se convirtió en crucial en un territorio colonial. Nuestro estudio pretende contribuir al conocimiento de la historia de Guinea y a la comprensión de las diversas comunidades europeas establecidas en África.

PALABRAS CLAVE: colonos, Guinea Ecuatorial, colonialismo, catalanes

ABSTRACT: *With this paper we present an analysis of a group of white settlers almost completely neglected by historiography, the Catalans that migrated to Spanish Guinea (present-day Guinea Ecuatorial). We highlight how in spite of being rarely involved directly in the administration of the territory, Catalans were determinant to its economic evolution. Through a constant and systematic lobbying in both Guinea and Madrid, Catalan individuals, companies and institutions managed to influence the colonial policies of the Spanish government and to control the production and export of the main Guinean crop, cocoa. For a long period, Barcelona was the capital of a small empire in Equatorial*

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Cómo citar / How to cite: Gargallo, Eduard; Sant, Jordi. (2026). «A Central Periphery: Catalan Settlers and the Economy of Spanish Guinea (1778-1968)», *Historia Contemporánea*, 81, 405-438. (<https://doi.org/10.1387/hc.25253>).

Recibido: 13 noviembre, 2023; aceptado: 29 abril, 2024.

ISSN 1130-2402 - eISSN 2340-0277 / © 2022 Historia Contemporánea (UPV/EHU)



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Africa, and a national minority in the metropole became crucial in a colonial territory. Our study wishes to contribute to the knowledge of Guinean history and to the understanding of the diverse European communities settled in Africa.

KEYWORDS: *settlers, Equatorial Guinea, colonialism, Catalans*

LABURPENA: Artikulu honetan historiografiak oso gutxi aztertu duen Europako kolono-talde bat aztertuko dugu: Ginea Espainiarrera (gaur egungo Ekuatore Ginea) emigratu zuten katalanak. Nabarmenduko dugu katalanak erabakigarriak izan zirela lurralde hartako bilakaera ekonomikoan, bertako administrazioan inplikazio mugatua izan bazuten ere. Ginean zein Madrilan lobby-lan etengabe eta sistematiko baten bidez, Kataluniako gizabanako, konpainia eta erakundeek Espainiako Gobernuaren politika kolonialetan eragitea lortu zuten, baita Gineako labore nagusiaren, hau da, kakaoaren, ekoizpena eta esportazioa kontrolatzea ere. Luzaroan, Bartzelona Ekuatore Afrikako inperio txiki baten hiriburua izan zen, eta metropoliko gutxiengo nazional eta kultural bat erabakigarria izan zen lurralde kolonial hartan. Gure ikerketak Gineako historia ezagutzen eta Afrikan kokatu ziren europar komunitateak ulertzen lagundu nahi du.

GAKO-HITZAK: kolonoak, Ekuatore Ginea, kolonialismoa, katalanak

Introduction

Within the academic literature devoted to the history of colonial Africa, there is a significant component of analysis of the white communities that settled on the continent. This literature has increasingly highlighted the differentiation within these populations. Diversity in national origin, religion, class, or gender has been shown to be relevant and the necessity to avoid viewing the populations of European origin as homogeneous or monolithic has been underlined. Considering intra-European differences is helpful when it comes to understand government policies, the economic evolution of the territories, and the relationship with African or other non-European communities.¹

Within this context, we wish to present an analysis of an almost completely neglected group of white settlers, the Catalans that migrated to Spanish Guinea (present-day Guinea Ecuatorial). In fact, there is a dearth of historical studies of Guinea — both in its colonial and post-colonial periods —, especially in English². We try to address this situation by focusing our work on a specific and very relevant community of European origin and by covering the whole colonial period, from the early attempts by the Spanish authorities to establish a presence in the island of Fernando Po, to independence in 1968.

We have made extensive use of archival sources, mostly held at the Archivo General de la Administración in Alcalá de Henares and the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya in Sant Cugat del Vallès. We have also consulted official reports, contemporary publications (such as journals and books), and we have conducted interviews with former settlers or their descendants.

Based on all these sources, we provide a general overview of the Catalan presence in Guinea. Catalans belonged to a national group with a specific language and culture, and that was, during the period under analysis, often in conflict or at least in tension with the central government. In the metropole, a variety of Catalan nationalist movements

¹ Elkins and Pedersen, 2005; Bickers, 2014; Castelo, 2007; Money and Van-Zyl Hermann, 2020; Mosley, 1983; Walther, 2002; Morrell, 1992; Kennedy, 1987.

² In English, we can highlight Martin-Márquez, 2008; Okenve, 2007; Lynn, 1984; Clarence-Smith, 1994; Clarence-Smith, 1985; Liniger-Goumaz, 1988; Martino, 2022; Sundiata, 1996. In Spanish, Campos, 2002; De Castro and Ndongo, 1998; Díaz Matarranz, 2005; García Cantús, 2004; Álvarez Chillida and Aranzadi, 2020; Nerín, 2010.

and parties appeared in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Catalans were often seen as suspects of undermining Spanish unity or sovereignty. In spite of all this, and although Catalans were rarely involved directly in the administration of Guinea, we will see how they were determinant to the economic evolution of the colony, and Catalan individuals, companies and institutions managed to influence the colonial policies of the Spanish government.

We wish, on the one hand, to show how a specific group of settlers shaped the type of colonization that Guinea was subjected to and, on the other hand, to add to the knowledge of specific European communities in Africa during the colonial period.³

Beginnings: Slave Trade in the Gulf of Guinea

In order to understand the role of Catalans in the colonization of Guinea it is necessary to go back to the late eighteenth century. Catalonia was then experiencing a robust economic growth sustained by agricultural expansion — mostly of wheat farming and vines — and a dynamic trading sector. Catalan elites lobbied Spanish authorities in the direction of a trade liberalization that would increase the presence of Catalans in colonial markets. Although they had their eyes set principally on the Spanish American empire, the Gulf of Guinea held significant potential as well, as the slave trade to supply American plantations was at its height.

Very soon, the Spanish government seized the opportunity offered by colonial border negotiations with Portugal. In 1777 and 1778, the El Pardo and San Ildefonso treaties transferred the islands of Fernando Po (present-day Bioko) and Annobon to Spain in exchange for a redrawing of the boundary between Brazil and Spanish Southern American territories. The treaties included the transfer of preferential trading rights with the neighbouring coastal areas, from the Niger delta to Cape Lopez, in present-day Gabon.⁴

Fernando Po was a small island in the middle of the Biafra Gulf, next to the Cameroon coastland, and inhabited by the Bubi people. Annobon was a tiny island south-west of São Tomé and Príncipe, uninhabited until

³ Stassen, 2011; Giliomee, 2003; Shain and Mendelsohn, no date; MacKenzie, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 1999; Stals, 2011.

⁴ García Cantús, 2004, p. 13.

the arrival of slaves and freedmen from Portuguese colonies. Although both territories had been under nominal Portuguese sovereignty, they had never been effectively occupied and were only sporadically used by slave trading ships looking for supplies.

Spanish plans in the region were soon altered. On the one hand, the first Spanish expedition to Fernando Po failed miserably, due to the high mortality rate among sailors and soldiers and to Bubi resistance. The islands were never subjected to Spanish rule.⁵ Later, Spain's political crisis during the years after the French revolution contributed to the total neglect of the small African colonies. On the other hand, the wider context of the Atlantic slave trade was affected by the abolitionist treaties advanced by Britain and which Spain reluctantly signed in 1817. It must be said, however, that the consolidation of Cuban sugar production kept slave trade alive, and Spanish traders on the Central African coast played a significant role in it, often in collusion with the Spanish authorities in Cuba.

In fact, in 1827 Britain took partial control of Fernando Po, which was regarded as a potential site for the anti-slave trade courts that were being established in West Africa. British presence led to the founding of the first colonial settlement (the town of Clarence, later Santa Isabel) and to the arrival of a significant number of African workers from neighbouring British colonies, mostly Sierra Leone, and from Liberia. Slaves recently liberated by the Royal Navy also remained in Clarence. Out of these communities emerged the group known as *Fernandinos*, heavily influenced by Anglophone culture and protestantism.⁶ They stayed in Clarence after the British withdrawal in 1835.

By then, Spain considered abandoning or selling the islands, but some political and economic groups insisted on their retention. Prominent among them was the Cuban slave owners lobby, who saw Fernando Po as a key base to proceed with the – now illegal – slave trade in the region. At that time, several big Catalan slave traders such as Samà, Panxo Martí, Pau Forcadé, Miró i Pié, or Josep Maria Borrell, were establishing themselves on the continental coast. Other Catalans, such as the Roviroso brothers, founded trading stations in Gabon and Congo and owned ships that transported slaves to Cuba and Brasil.⁷ The Barcelona company Vidal

⁵ Díaz Matarranz, 2005, pp. 12-13.

⁶ Martín del Molino, 1993, pp. 93-94; Lynn, 1984, pp. 261-265.

⁷ Fradera, 1987, pp. 119-139; Rodrigo Alharilla, 2013, pp. 176-199; Nerín, 2015, pp. 247-251.

y Ribas, led by Josep Vidal, a leading Catalan merchant, vicepresident of the Chamber of Commerce, combined ‘legal’ trade of alcohol, palm wine, timber and cloth with slave trading on the African coast. Vidal was a close associate of Doménech i Mustic, a slave trader, in Vidal, Mustich & Co, together with other Catalans such as Carlos Torrens and Esteve Gatell, powerful entrepreneurs involved in the establishment of the Banc de Barcelona, one of the leading Spanish financial institutions at the time. In 1855 the Spanish government, at Vidal y Ribas’ request, appointed Mustic as Governor of Fernando Po, which led to British protests and fears that Fernando Po, Corisco and Annobon would be turned into slave trading stations. Royal Navy interventions against vessels suspect of carrying slaves led to Mustic’s resignation one year later.⁸

In 1858 the Societat Econòmica Barcelonesa d’Amics del País (SEBAP), an association devoted to the economic development of the city, sent a memorandum to Queen Isabel II in which the future potential of the Gulf of Guinea for the growing Catalan industry was highlighted. They requested the appointment of Spanish consuls in the main West African ports and the effective control over Fernando Po and Annobon, in order to ensure some protection against Royal Navy patrols.⁹

All this lobbying was influential in the sending that same year of a new expedition, under military officer Carlos Chacón, to both islands. Chacón’s arrival led to attempts to attract the Bubi population, the construction of the first colonial infrastructures, such as the customs and a hospital, and a timid encouragement of Spanish trade.¹⁰ Results were meagre and all along the 1860s and 1870s Spanish trading activities were minimal. Catalan industry was experiencing a slump, and during the 1860s decade only an average of seven Spanish ships reached Santa Isabel each year; in 1870 only four out of 151 vessels entering the port were Spanish, in 1882 this number had fallen to zero.¹¹ It is true, though, that some of these ships came from Catalonia, and the Barcelonese Coca Obón y Compañía established a factory in Santa Isabel.¹² The viscount

⁸ Nerín, 2015, pp. 195-200.

⁹ The full text can be found in Anglasell, 1858.

¹⁰ Díaz Matarranz, 2005, pp. 68-69.

¹¹ Archivo General de la Administración (hereafter AGA), Fondo III: Administración en los territorios de Guinea. Box (15) 004 81/6967. Estado del movimiento de los buques habido en este Puerto durante el mes de la fecha (several years).

¹² De Castro and De La Calle, 1992, p. 147; Díaz Matarranz, 2005, p. 77.

of San Javier, during his trip along the coast and on his way to Fernando Po, noted that ‘the only Spanish province that maintains commercial relationships with the African coast is Barcelona, and you can see everywhere the laborious and trading spirit of the Catalan people’.¹³

Settlement: Cocoa and Chocolate

The growth of Catalan presence in Guinea was fundamentally linked to the development of the chocolate industry and cocoa trade.¹⁴ In the second half of the nineteenth century, technical advances improved the productive capacities of the European chocolate industry, chocolate became cheaper to manufacture, consumer prices fell and consumption expanded.¹⁵ In Spain, Catalonia and the Basque Country played a pioneering role in this process, and in the years after 1880 the number of chocolate manufacturers increased and many workshops were transformed into small factories.¹⁶ The first big companies, such as Chocolates Amatller, Juncosa or Jaume Boix, made their appearance.¹⁷

Cocoa production and trade became attractive business propositions, and Fernando Po, with its ideal climatic and geological conditions, drew some investors’ attention. Cocoa had been first introduced by the leading Fernandino families, who had capital, land, knowledge and commercial networks to conduct the planting and trading. The Dougan, Barleycorn, Jones, Balboa, Knox or Kinson linages developed the first plantations in 1880, and throughout the next decade, they held a majority of the land concessions¹⁸. In 1887 the Compañía Trasatlántica, owned by the Barcelona-based marquis of Comillas, established a line of steamships that connected colony and metropole once a month. Since then, Barcelona became a port of entry of colonial cocoa to be used by the Catalan and

¹³ Muñoz, 1871, p. 122.

¹⁴ For Catalonia’s chocolate-making tradition see Martí, 2004.

¹⁵ De Coe and De Coe, 1996; Clarence-Smith, 2000; Tatjer, 2014, p. 17.

¹⁶ Sant, 2017a, p. 49.

¹⁷ Martí, 2004, pp.140-48; Nadal and Tafunell, 1992, p.95; <http://www.chocolateamatller.com/>; Tatjer, 2014, pp.17-22; https://elpais.com/ccaa/2013/08/12/catalunya/1376335646_329809.html (accessed 10 March 2020).

¹⁸ Sundiata, 1996, pp. 92-93; Clarence-Smith, 1989, p. 492; González Echegaray, 2003, pp. 205-212.

Spanish chocolate industry, as well as a gate through which manufactures and capital could be sent to Guinea.¹⁹

The first Catalan company to establish itself in Fernando Po was Rius y Torres, in 1880, although its first plantation, La Barcelonesa, only came under production in 1894.²⁰ In 1895, the Buxeras Hermanos y Font company arrived, and, following a practice that became widespread among Catalan planters, left its lands in the hands of a locally-resident manager, in this case Bonaventura Roig.²¹ Another of the prominent Catalan plantations was La Vigatana, owned by three partners: Miquel Trías i Trías, Jaume Riera i Caralt and Josep Vilarrassa i Arenas.²²

Besides these relatively well capitalised companies, we can find in Fernando Po a diverse assortment of adventurers/prospective settlers completely devoid of any means and trying their luck with cocoa planting. Many failed but some others succeeded in becoming prosperous planters and entrepreneurs. A significant number of them came from the area of Sant Feliu de Guíxols, in the northern coast of Catalonia. The most famous was Joaquim Rodríguez Barrera, who as a young man became manager of a 182-hectare cocoa farm owned by wealthy Sant Feliu industrialists. They soon decided to sell their investments in Fernando Po and Joaquim Rodríguez bought the lands and established the *Montserrat* and *Montseny* farms.²³

Through Rodríguez's connection, other people from Sant Feliu arrived. One of them was Joan Doménech i Viñas who, with his partner Francesc Potau, founded the Potau y Doménech plantation. Journalist Francisco Madrid explained in 1933:

The model of them [cocoa planters] is a Catalan called Potau, who has been invested by Catalans as the distinguished and honorary consul of Catalonia. Potau is a man who sailed [from Barcelona] on the same day that the first incidents of the Tragic Week of 1909 erupted. He was then a young man ready to work, generous and enterprising. (...). He had to live on credit, remake gradually his initial fortunes as crops where not as flourishing as expected (...). But through his strong will,

¹⁹ For the Trasatlántica's role see Rodrigo Alharilla, 2002, pp. 133-166.

²⁰ Díaz Matarranz, 2005, pp.101-102; *La larga historia de Gabriel Rius*. <http://vidamaritima.com/2007/10/la-larga-historia-del-gabriel-rius/> (accessed 21 March 2020).

²¹ *La Guinea Española*, 899 (8 December 1935), p.366.

²² Díaz Matarranz, 2005, pp. 101-102.

²³ *Montserrat* and *Montseny* are the names of two well-known mountains in Catalonia.

resistance to competition, honest life (...) Potau and his partner Doménech managed to get a plantation²⁴

Another one was Salvador Sendrós, while Josep Rosselló Boleda arrived in the late 1920s and not only owned cocoa (and later coffee) plantations but he also established the *Suministros Coloniales* (SUMCO) company, that would become one of the leading trading firms in Guinea.²⁵ Finally, Antonio Pérez López was known as the ‘emperor of cocoa’. Born in León but married to a Catalan and with his businesses based in Barcelona, he was a planter and large wholesale trader, and managed to control most of the sales by small and middle planters, both Spanish and African.²⁶

Barcelona as Colonial Harbour

With Catalans making a remarkable impact on cocoa planting and trading in Fernando Po, Barcelona strengthened its role as the main metropolitan port dealing in colonial products. Although the *Transatlántica* ships stopped at several Spanish cities, in 1910 92 per cent of cocoa bags imported from Guinea were unloaded on the Barcelona docks. Some of the first planters soon became involved in these trading activities and established themselves as cocoa buyers or distributors, or both. Buyers gradually controlled Guinean exports, by shipping not only their own production but also the crops acquired on commission from smaller farmers. Distributors controlled the arrival of cocoa in Barcelona and sold it to wholesalers and chocolate manufacturers. Many of the larger colonial companies managed to combine planting, buying and distribution, and a significant proportion of those were Catalan: Rius y Torres, Ramon Goula, Buxeras y Font, Joaquim Rodríguez Barrera or Antonio Pérez.²⁷ The majority of these settlers divided their lives between Catalonia and Guinea, partly as a response to the climatic conditions in the colony, which were considered unhealthy. As already indicated, the

²⁴ Madrid, 1933, p. 82.

²⁵ Interview with Josep Rosselló, 9 October 2019.

²⁶ AGA, Fondo III: Administración de los territorios de Guinea. Box (15) 004 81/08183, A. Babiloni Navarro, Los Territorios del Golfo Guinea vistos por un colono al terminar el año 1934, p. 96.

²⁷ *La Voz de Fernando Poo*, 35 (15 November 1911), p. 10.

daily management of plantations and factories was in the hands of managers — aided by foremen — while the owners visited Fernando Po only from time to time.

Barcelona was also the main source of exports bound for Guinea. The colony was never a significant market for Spanish manufactures, due to its small size, both in territorial and demographical terms.²⁸ Catalan companies that reached the Guinean markets did not open local delegations but worked through factories owned by the cocoa planters. Joaquim Rodríguez Barrera, for instance, placed an advertisement in the Claretian journal *La Guinea Española* offering ‘a wide range of shirts, perfumes, shoes, food, imitation jewelry, umbrellas, clothing, etc., etc.’²⁹ Alcoholic drinks were one of the main exports.

The Complexities of Cocoa Production and the Institutionalization of a Colonial Lobby

Cocoa planters faced two main difficulties. On the one hand, plantations were hardly profitable in their early stages, as production was not significant until five years after planting, and full productivity was not reached before the eighth year.³⁰ Landowners were frequently in need of cash and resorted to credit, often provided by wealthier planters. Lenders charged very high rates of interest and usually demanded a share of the farmer’s crop as repayment. Lack of capital also led to precarious drying, storing and transporting techniques, resulting in the poor quality of much of Fernando Po’s cocoa. On the other hand, when it reached the metropole, Guinean cocoa was subjected to unfavourable custom duties, that were doubled in 1899.³¹ The authorities wished to cover the expenses of the Guinean administration with these taxes.

Catalan planters started experiencing serious difficulties and the company J.Huelín acknowledged that import duties led to attempts to

²⁸ *La Voz de Fernando Poo*, 354 (March 1926), p. 9.

²⁹ López Canto, 1916, p. 52; *La Guinea Española*, 505 (25 September 1921), p. 4.

³⁰ AGA, Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Box (15) 004 81/6373. Resumen por años de los saldos que arrojan los desembolsos con sus intereses y los ingresos de una supuesta plantación de cacao de 50 hectáreas de terreno virgen.

³¹ AGA, Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Caixa 81/6413. Joaquim Coll Astrell, Fernando Poo. Estado actual y porvenir de la colonia.

cut production costs, often resulting in a drop in quality, and this was making their production increasingly uncompetitive, as many chocolate manufacturers preferred to buy cocoa from São Tomé or Latin America. It was a bit more expensive but of a much higher quality.³²

In order to deal with all these problems, defend their interests and lobby colonial and metropolitan authorities, cocoa planters and traders decided to organize themselves. The Cámara Agrícola de Fernando Po was founded in 1906. On its first Board we can find, among others, Francisco Sabater (on behalf of the Transatlántica), Antonio López and Bonaventura Roig, and some leading Fernandinos such as Maximiliano Jones and Samuel Kinson.³³

One of the first decisions of the new Cámara was to establish a delegation in the metropole. They were aware that their influence in the colony would be insufficient as political and economic decisions were made in Madrid, not in Santa Isabel.³⁴ As there were hardly any colonial investors based in Madrid, the newly created Comité de la Cámara was located in Barcelona. In 1908 the presidency was offered to Ignasi Girona Vilanova, already president of the Catalan agricultural employers' association.³⁵

The presence of relevant members of the Catalan haute bourgeoisie, some of them closely linked to nationalist politics, raised some alarm within the Spanish government. The Comité was warned that its activities had to be restricted «exclusively to the protection of colonial interests, and to the development and progress of agriculture».³⁶ The Comité defended that its headquarters was established in Barcelona because most of the leading planters and traders were based there, and discarded any suspicion that the choice was politically motivated. One of its members insisted that:

³² AGA, Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Caixa (15) 004 81/6373. Telegram to the Governor General.

³³ *La Guinea Española*, 53 (12 January 1907), p. 68.

³⁴ Pereira, 1989, pp. 247-272.

³⁵ Sant, 2018, pp.152-153; AGA, Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Box (15) 004 81/6410. Cámara Agrícola de Fernando Poo.

³⁶ AGA Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Box (15) 004 81/6410. Correspondence between the State Ministry and the Cámara Agrícola de Fernando Poo.

As Barcelona is the most important and almost only Spanish market exporting and importing to the abovementioned colonies, and it is also the city of choice of the main planters when they come to the Peninsula to recover their health, I understand that this Comité has the duty to respond with its initiatives to the confidence that they have bestowed upon it (...)

We have to (...) address frequently to the Ministries and, if needed, to His Majesty the King with requirements describing (...) the deficiencies of our rulers when it comes to the administration and colonization of that country, until we achieve practical dispositions (...) that will show how Catalonia is not exclusivist but, on the contrary, is concerned by the unrest of all the Spanish³⁷

One of the Comité's main objectives was the modification of custom duties in order to ease the importation of Guinea's cocoa. In late 1910 a commission was sent to Madrid in order to lobby the government. Antonio Pérez and Joaquim Rodríguez Barrera, among others, succeeded in convincing the authorities to introduce a key legal instrument: the *cupo*.

In line with the traditional protectionist policies that had been advocated by the Catalan bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century, the new regulations contemplated a yearly quota of Guinean cocoa (the *cupo*) that would go through Spanish customs under a very reduced duty (0.5 pesetas per Kg), while duties charged to foreign cocoa were substantially increased (up to 1.2 pesetas per Kg). In practical terms, this policy created a reserved market for Guinea's cocoa, and the *cupo* was expected to be adjusted every year according to the volume of the crop. The system soon led to an increase of cocoa prices: in 1910 one kilogram of cocoa was being paid at 1.9 pesetas in Barcelona's harbour, in 1912 it cost 2.8, and in 1917 it reached 3.9. At the same time, the percentage of imported cocoa coming from Guinea also increased: in 1906 it was only 27 per cent of Spanish consumption, while in 1920 it was 55 per cent.³⁸

³⁷ Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya (ANC), Repository from the Casa de la Guinea Española. Box 2. Drafts of minutes of the Barcelona Committee (no date).

³⁸ Muguerza, 1905, p. 65. *Boletín del Comité de Defensa Agrícola de Fernando Poo*. 1st August 1910, pp. 4, 23; and *La Voz de Fernando Poo*, (1913-1920). Precios por kilogramos fijados para la venta del cacao de Fernando Poo y Guinea Continental Española, en las fechas que se indican. ANC, Repository from the Casa de la Guinea Española. Box 5.

As expected, Catalan and Spanish chocolate manufacturers resented these measures and even attempted to boycott them. They insisted that, on the one hand, the *cupo* caused an artificial rise in prices, not linked to any improvement in the quality of the product. On the other hand, they argued that it benefited only ‘those wealthy capitalists that send important shipments out (...) but small planters’ interests are harmed as they are forced to sell their crops at below market prices’ because, once the *cupo* was filled, excess cocoa was heavily taxed at the Spanish ports of entry.³⁹

Since 1910 every rise of the *cupo* led to angry disputes not only between colonial producers and metropolitan manufacturers, but also among the planters themselves. The leading Barcelona companies that controlled most of the market (such as Pérez, Vigatana, Rodríguez Barrera, Buixeras y Font) wanted limited increases in order to avoid overflows of the market that would cause a fall in prices. Planters without a stake in trading activities demanded a higher *cupo* that would cover the whole Guinean crop. The Spanish government normally announced intermediate quotas, but large Catalan traders and planters gradually imposed their views.

New problems surfaced after the end of the First World War. Prices of Guinean cocoa plummeted, and a general post-war economic crisis in Catalonia made circumstances worse. The Cámara Agrícola complained that ‘the monetary crisis that is specially affecting Catalonia, where most of the planters reside (...) has had as a consequence the restriction of credit offered by banks and private individuals to planters’.⁴⁰

All these troubles led to the establishment in August 1923 of yet another settlers’ institution, the Unión de Agricultores de Fernando Po, again under the leadership of Joaquim Rodríguez Barrera.⁴¹ He realised that to keep cocoa planting and trading profitable it was necessary to go beyond a simple trust that agreed on prices. He defended stronger actions to reevaluate Guinean cocoa, not only through the *cupo* and price-setting, but also through quality improvements. The Unión, therefore, fixed the prices of cocoa arrived in Barcelona according to its quality. The best types were valued at much higher prices than lower

³⁹ *La Voz de Fernando Poo*, 50 (1 August 1912), p. 8.

⁴⁰ AGA, Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Box (15) 004 81/6410. Cámara Agrícola. Proyecto de reconstitución. 1 August 1921.

⁴¹ Later to be called Unión de Agricultores de la Guinea Española.

grades. Rodríguez Barrera's goal was to encourage planters to invest in better techniques and to make Guinean cocoa attractive by its quality, not only by its low price.

Always under Rodríguez Barrera's presidency, the Unión was managed by a Board, elected every year by a General Assembly Meeting at which only the large planters and traders based in Barcelona assisted. As a matter of fact, all relevant decisions regarding cocoa trade were taken in the city, and many small and middle farmers delegated their voting rights to the traders that were handling their crops.

From then on, the Unión achieved an almost total control of the cocoa trade and, as expected, chocolate manufacturers' protests became louder. The Asociación de Fabricantes de Chocolates de España never stopped complaining of the artificially high prices of Guinea cocoa. It must also be said that the Unión's policies improved the quality of cocoa during the 1920s, a majority of shipments brought better grades, and Latin American cocoa was gradually displaced within the Spanish markets.

Prosperity brought new infusions of capital into Fernando Po and land concessions expanded. Many of them went to investors from Madrid, such as the Compañía Colonial de África, and the Basque Country, such as CAIFER (Compañía Agrícola Industrial de Fernando Po) or Izaguirre y Compañía. The importance of Catalan landowners dwindled: in 1911 they controlled 37.1 per cent of the plantations larger than one hundred hectares, but in 1928 they held 16.6 per cent of them.⁴² Between 1925 and 1930 cocoa production doubled and reached 10,000 tonnes per year.⁴³

The Crisis of Catalan Protectionism

This era of relative prosperity was short, though. The 1930s international crisis led to a fall in cocoa and chocolate consumption and to a clash within the Unión, which wished to somehow reduce prices and keep the *cupo* at moderate levels, in order not to flood the market. Cocoa surpluses outside of the *cupo* would have to be sold in foreign markets. But this strategy was furiously contested by many of the newly-established companies, who felt that the Unión was mainly protecting the leading

⁴² Sant, 2017a, p. 226-227.

⁴³ *La Voz de Fernando Poo*, 439 (April 1933), p. 1.

companies, based in Barcelona, and forcing the others to send their crops abroad at lower prices. Critics, like the Mallo brothers, CAIFER and the Compañía Colonial Africana, soon took control of the Cámara Agrícola in Santa Isabel. Elections to the Cámara's new Board were controversial and considered fraudulent by the Unión, which accused the bigger Madrid and Basque companies of coercing smaller planters into voting for their candidates. The Board's first decision was to transfer the Cámara's delegation in Spain from Barcelona to Madrid. This effectively broke the traditionally symbiotic relation between the delegation and the Unión, both sited in the same building in Barcelona, and both controlled — until then — by the same leading Catalan families and firms. The new delegation began to lobby the government in order to increase the *cupo* and undermine the Unión's protectionist efforts.

The growing overproduction crisis, however, led to a rapprochement between the Unión and the delegation. In 1933, cocoa and chocolate consumption were still falling and both sectors decided to apply their combined pressure on the authorities in order to force chocolate manufacturers to use higher percentages of cocoa. Spain had by then one of the least demanding legislations in Europe: most countries requested between 30 and 40 per cent of cocoa in chocolate, while Spanish manufacturers only had to use 18 per cent.⁴⁴ Manufacturers replied that they would increase cocoa percentages as soon as measures to keep prices artificially high were removed.⁴⁵

Clashes between the Guinean lobby and the chocolate industry continued until the end of 1935. The Unión decided then to advance a new proposal. They would cease to set prices and control quality and the government would establish a new public institution charged with the distribution of Guinean cocoa and the setting of prices. All traders would be forced to sell to it. The Comité Sindical del Cacao was created in September 1935 and it was based in Barcelona. It had no time to function, as the manufacturers boycotted it and, a few months later, the Spanish Civil War began.

⁴⁴ ANC, Repository from the Casa de la Guinea Española. Box 7. Contrabando. 5 October 1923.

⁴⁵ AGA, Fondo I: Organismos centrales de la Administración Colonial. Box (15) 004 81/6861. Cacao, expedientes sobre producción, comercio y fabricación de chocolate, 25 February 1933.

Catalans in Rio Muni

The Spanish territories along the African coast, known as Rio Muni, remained poorly explored until the turning of the century and were only put under effective control during the mandate of Governor Núñez de Prado in the 1920s. Attempts to develop its economic potential initially focused on timber. Since the late nineteenth century German, French and British companies had been trading with Africans⁴⁶, but the capacity of the local populations to provide high quality timber from areas near the coast and rivers was quickly diminishing, and new capital investments and industrial technologies were required. In 1926 the Spanish administration started a programme of large concessions to companies that would invest heavily in forestry projects. To carry out an efficient exploitation of their areas, investors needed to open roads and railway transportation, build workers' accommodation, and introduce lorries and new machinery. Between 1926 and 1936 110,000 hectares were distributed as large plots.

Although many of the concessionaires were Basque companies (Izaguirre, Compañía Vasco-Africana), Catalan capital was also present. In 1929 several important Catalan business and financial men - such as the Recasens brothers, Carles Maristany, Lluís Ferrer-Vidal or Carles Sentmenat - led by the main Catalan banks (Banc de Catalunya and Banco Hispano-Colonial) established the Compañía Nacional de Colonización Africana (ALENA). This company, based in Barcelona, not only exploited its forestry concessions, but also established trading stations and coffee plantations. It became the biggest enterprise in the Muni, and it controlled 30,000 hectares, or 28 per cent of all the lands under exploitation. In the 1930s ALENA represented 50 per cent of all the colony's timber exports, which were mostly shipped to Hamburg and Rotterdam. Valencia and Barcelona were minor customers. As it was the case with other Catalan enterprises, some of the ALENA's directors had strong links with the nationalist movement around the Lliga Regionalista.⁴⁷ Another Catalan forestry company of some relevance was Jover y Graells, created in 1926 and with its main concession, 2,500 hectares in extension, on the river Mongo.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Guerra Velasco and Pascual Ruiz-Valdepeñas, 2017a, pp. 135-166.

⁴⁷ Nerín, 2010, p. 246.

⁴⁸ Guerra Velasco and Pascual Ruiz-Valdepeñas, 2017a, pp. 144-145.

Besides timber, coffee also became an important economic asset in Río Muni. Fernandinos had introduced it there at the end of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the 1930s that exports grew. Many forestry concessionaires established coffee plantations as a side investment on already deforested areas. ALENA, for instance, planted some 1,800 hectares. Antonio Pérez López also expanded its coffee business, as did some of the Basque companies. Other coffee planters, though, were small to medium entrepreneurs, not linked to timber concessions. Such was the case of Giménez-Ferrer, a conglomerate of four Catalan partners, who in 1927 established a plantation called Virgen de Montserrat in Oveng (Bata region).⁴⁹ In 1932 the plantation started producing, although one of the partners, Ramon Reig, complained of economic difficulties and asked for bigger investments by the society.

Guinea and Two Wars

When the Spanish Civil War started in July 1936, Guinea was calm for some time and the authorities seemed to remain loyal to the Republican government. In September, though, military and police units took control of Fernando Po on behalf of Franco's rebels, and the same happened in October in Río Muni.

This had serious economic implications. Transportation between Guinea and Barcelona or Valencia was severed, as both remained under Republican control. Isolated from the main metropolitan economic centers, the colony experienced problems to export its products and to import what was needed. Prices soon skyrocketed. Most of the exports and supplies were now shipped by German vessels. Gradually, though, production returned to normal levels and the colony supplied Franco's administration and troops with copra, palm oil and timber.⁵⁰

When this conflict ended in April 1939, there was hardly any time for a return to normality, as the Second World War began just five months

⁴⁹ The library of the Institució Milà i Fontanals (CSIC) holds the Repository Giménez-Ferrer. Although it has not been catalogued yet, we thank Yolanda Aixelà for facilitating our access to some documents regarding the origins of this company.

⁵⁰ Perpiñá Grau, 1945, pp. 330, 344-345; *La Guinea Española*, 961 (14 February 1937), p. 55; 978 (13 June 1937), p. 195; 979 (20 June 1937), p. 203; 980 (27 June 1937), p. 209; 984 (25 July 1937), p. 243; 1117 (11 February 1940); Sundiata, 1996, p. 179.

later. Trade and transportation difficulties, dearth of supplies and inflation continued and intensified. The abnormal international circumstances and Franco's regime own ideology led to an increased State intervention in economic matters, protectionism and autarchy.⁵¹

Cocoa exports were significantly reduced in 1940-1941 and one of the leading Catalan firms, FRAPEJO, complained in 1942 of the evolution in 'a really strangling way of agricultural as well as trading activities'⁵². When the situation gradually improved, the colony shipped coffee, cocoa, hides and timber to Spain. Between 1940 and 1946 Guinea and the Canary Islands jointly provided 16 per cent of all metropolitan imports⁵³. The Spanish government complied with most of the requests made by cocoa planters and traders, and new legislation forced chocolate manufacturers to increase the percentage of cocoa to 36 per cent, while high prices were officially set.⁵⁴ Coffee prices were also kept at levels very favourable to Guinean producers.⁵⁵

The postwar era

After the War, Spain tried to reform its colonial discourse and — in a way similar to Salazar's Portugal — to portray a more benevolous version of imperial rule, emphasizing assimilationist and vaguely egalitarian theories. According to Francoist ideologues, Spain was a 'civilizing', not exploitative, nation, racism and segregation were absent from its territories, and both its African 'provinces' and subjects were gradually advancing towards full equality with the metropole.⁵⁶ Guinea was by then — together with many other African colonies — entering a period of economic growth and expanded investment by both government and the

⁵¹ Martínez Carreras, 1985, pp. 243-255.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 248-249; ANC. Box 8. Memorandums FRAPEJO 1942-1947, 'Notas de interés colonial sobre Comercio, Economía y Legislación', 15 February 1942 and 20 June 1942.

⁵³ Perpiñá Grau, 1945, pp. 332-333; Rubiés, 2013, pp. 66-68; Sundiata, 1996, p. 179.

⁵⁴ ANC. Box 8. Memorandums FRAPEJO 1942-1947, 10 March 1942 and 20 March 1944.

⁵⁵ ANC. Box 8. Memorandums FRAPEJO 1942-1947, 30 June 1943, 31 July 1943 and December 1944.

⁵⁶ Nerín, 1997, pp.9-30; Álvarez Chillida, 2013, pp.41-67.

private sector. And Catalans would continue to be a significant part of this process.

The main settler association, the Unión, had been replaced. In March 1941 the Casa de la Guinea Española (CGE) was established in Barcelona, with headquarters on the same building of the old Unión, and it inherited all its assets. The CGE would continue lobbying on behalf on planters and traders before the Spanish authorities. Joaquim Rosich, became the president, and two old Catalan Guinean hands were sent as delegates to Santa Isabel: Francesc Potau and Joan Doménech.⁵⁷

As indicated, the colony's economy was expanding and the government maintained its policies of officially-set prices and protection of metropolitan markets for the Guinean producers.⁵⁸ The African colonies were by then providing 11 per cent of Spanish imports, two thirds of which came from Guinea.⁵⁹ Colonial budgets expanded and GDP per capita grew by an average of 2.72 per cent between 1951 and 1959.⁶⁰ Needless to say, the Guinean economy depended almost exclusively on cocoa, coffee and timber production.

The Comité Sindical del Cacao, now based in Madrid, reinforced its role as the key institution that fixed cocoa prices to the benefit of colonial producers and to the detriment of metropolitan manufacturers and consumers. In the 1940s the best quality Guinean cocoa was being paid at more than twice the price of 1936.⁶¹ Planters were well aware of their dependency from official protectionism. In 1950:

The Cámaras Oficiales Agrícolas of the colony, considering the announced rise of cocoa prices, and as a token of gratitude and respect towards our first Authority, Don Faustino Ruiz González, unanimously agreed to award ten cents for each kilogram of cocoa produced in the colony towards social and charity work sponsored by His Excellency⁶²

⁵⁷ ANC. Box 5. Minutes of the Board; Box 11, correspondence SUMCO; Carpeta Centros Oficiales de Barcelona. Estatutos de la Casa de la Guinea Española.

⁵⁸ A. Campos, 2002, p. 37; *La Guinea Española*, 1403 (10 February 1954), p. 59.

⁵⁹ Carnero Lorenzo, 2015, pp. 26-37; Carnero Lorenzo and Díaz de la Paz, 2014, pp. 707-734; *La Guinea Española*, 1513 (10 February 1959), pp. 33-34.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp.729-731; Carrasco-Gallego, 2015, pp. 38-52.

⁶¹ Sant, 2017b, pp.139-164; Muñoz, 2016-1017, pp.35-47; ANC. Box 8. Memorandums FRAPEJO 1942-1947, 10 March 1942 and 31 December 1945.

⁶² *La Guinea Española*, 1324 (25 September 1950), p.352.

When in 1952, government partially liberalized cocoa trade, authorities still set yearly ‘the cupos intended to supply the national markets and exports’, and the Comité ‘will supervise these trading operations in order to guarantee the supply of national markets and prevent price speculation’.⁶³ That decade, with steady price increases, land concessions expanded: in 1950 25,000 hectares were planted with cocoa, and in 1960 there were 57,800 hectares.⁶⁴ A new cocoa price ‘liberalization’ was approved in August 1959 but the General Commission for Supplies and Transportation was again charged with price and production surveillance and, if needed, control.⁶⁵

Catalan companies remained among the leading cocoa producers and traders: FRAPEJO, Salvador Sendrós, SUMCO, Rodríguez Barrera. They were joined by Agencia Fortuny, Ltda., established in 1934 and owner of plantations, mechanical workshops and building businesses.⁶⁶ In this context of economic growth some of the Catalan companies, such as Rodríguez Barrera, decided to transform themselves into limited companies. This was also the case of Pérez-Portabella, that became Francisco Pérez e Hijos S.A. (FRAPEJO), acted as the importing agency for Volkswagen and Mercedes, and supplied the colony with food, beverages and a variety of manufactures, most of them from Catalonia. They had around 3,000 employees, and two head managers were responsible for their Guinean affairs.⁶⁷ The Roselló family and its company, SUMCO, expanded their activities, exported coffee and cocoa to Spain and was the importing agency for Renault, Bosch and Siemens.⁶⁸ Finally, Francesc Recasens Mercadé was president of ALENA for many years and also the founder of the Compañía Agrícola Comercial Africana, known as ALADA S.A. The new company had its headquarters in Tetouan, in the Spanish Morocco, exported all sorts of products to the Spanish colonies and opened trading factories in Santa Isabel, Bata, Río Benito and Kogo. Recasens was a leading figure in the Catalan economic

⁶³ *La Guinea Española*, 1374 (25 November 1952), pp. 436-437.

⁶⁴ Álvarez Chillida, 2020, p. 347.

⁶⁵ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, September 1959.

⁶⁶ ANC, Box 12, Correspondence with members, 1949-1958; Ramírez Copeiro del Villar, 2004, pp. 159-161; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, February 1965.

⁶⁷ *La Guinea Española*, 1317 (10 June 1950), obituary; 1319 (25 June 1950), pp. 227-229; Sant, 2017b, p. 160; interview with Antonio Pérez Portabella, 11 March 2019.

⁶⁸ Interview with Josep Roselló i Rubió, 9 October 2019.

scene and played an important role in banking and oil enterprises. He also 'contributed to Catalan cultural endeavours, supporting theater and book publication'.⁶⁹ As usual, Catalan companies played a prominent role in the producers' associations, such as the *Cámara Agrícola de Fernando Po*.⁷⁰

Cocoa production increased markedly: in 1939-1940 14,361,179 kilograms were exported, and in 1957-58 21,392,886. In spite of the leading role of Catalan companies in the cocoa business, it is worth mentioning that in the late 1950s Valencia replaced Barcelona as the main port of entry of Guinean cocoa, maybe due to the proximity of Madrid's chocolate manufacturers.⁷¹

Guinean coffee also benefited from official protection and above-market price-setting. Production grew from 2,000 tonnes in 1940 to 7,100 in 1960.⁷² Contrary to cocoa, a significant percentage of coffee was planted by Africans: in 1956, out of the 4,614,205 kilograms grown in Río Muni, 3,289,791 came from Fang farmers.⁷³ Catalan presence in Muni and coffee production was smaller when compared to Fernando Po and cocoa, but ALADA, Franquesa, Arasa and Recasens were trading in the continental region, and Soler Calvet Plantación de Café grew coffee, as did the older Verge de Montserrat plantation.⁷⁴ Catalans were also influential in the coffee planters' associations, and Barcelona was the leading destination of coffee shipments in 1954.⁷⁵

A similar evolution can be detected for Guinean timber. Francoist protectionism provided a ready market in the metropole and from 1946 new forestry concessions were awarded: they covered 107,800 hectares in 1936

⁶⁹ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, October 1965; ANC, Box 11, Correspondence Centros Oficiales, no date.

⁷⁰ *La Guinea Española*, 1344 (10 August 1951), p. 296; 1460 (25 June 1956), p. 230.

⁷¹ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, August 1959, May 1958, March 1959; *La Guinea Española*, 1357 (10 March 1952), p. 89; 1519 (1 May 1959), p. 140.

⁷² Sant, 2017b, pp. 159-160.

⁷³ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, June 1957, May 1958; *La Guinea Española*, 1326 (10 November 1950), pp. 404-405.

⁷⁴ *La Guinea Española*, 1165 (10 January 1944), pp.14-15; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, February 1963; ANC, Box 12, Correspondence with members 1949-1958, correspondence file for first and second semesters 1947.

⁷⁵ *La Guinea Española*, 1388 (25 June 1953), pp. 234-235; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, May 1960; *La Guinea Española*, 1443 (10 October 1955), p. 380; ANC, Box 7, Press cuttings, *El Noticiero Universal*, 6 January 1956.

and 365,000 in 1960.⁷⁶ In 1950 63,000 tonnes of timber were exported while in 1958 exports reached 208,000 tonnes. Valencia was the main peninsular destination and Barcelona received around 17 per cent of the shipments.⁷⁷ Timber production was dominated by five companies: ALENA, Sociedad Colonial de Guinea (SOCOGUI), Izaguirre y Cia., AGGOR, and Juan Jover S.A. Catalan-owned ALENA concentrated 25 per cent of all production in the 1960s. As we have seen, Jover was also Catalan-owned.⁷⁸

Catalans in Guinea

Economic growth in the post-war decades saw a significant increase in European migration to Guinea. In 1942 Fernando Po had a total white population of 3,319 and in the Muni only 925 inhabitants were Europeans. In 1960 whites were 8,954 in Guinea as a whole, 3.64 per cent of the total population.⁷⁹

The influx of new Catalan settlers led to a diversification of occupations beyond the usual planters, big traders and missionaries. Social and geographical origins also diversified. Farm and factory managers remained a significant component of Catalan residents. Most of them could not be considered as part of the colonial elite, but they enjoyed high wages⁸⁰. Among the Catalan there were owners of small businesses such as restaurants⁸¹. The Bambú Restaurant in Santa Isabel, for instance, belonged to two settlers from Sitges. In the 1940s, the only hotel in Bata, the Guría, was owned by Pilar Conesa Carceller and had a Catalan cook⁸². Alfons Mas Moragues opened a pharmacy in 1936. Several of the newly

⁷⁶ Guerra Velasco and Pascual Ruiz-Valdepeñas, 2017b, pp. 6-25; Liniger-Goumaz, 1988, p. 37; *La Guinea Española*, 1441 (10 September 1955), pp. 328-331.

⁷⁷ *La Guinea Española*, 1396 (25 October 1953), pp. 397-398; 1430 (25 March 1955), p. 118; 1441 (10 September 1955), pp. 328-331; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, April 1959; Sant, 2017b, p. 159.

⁷⁸ Guerra Velasco and Pascual Ruiz-Valdepeñas, 2017b, pp. 9, 14-17, 19-20.

⁷⁹ Ramírez Copeiro del Villar, 2004, pp. 50, 120; Nerín, 2017, pp. 41-64; Álvarez Chilleda and Nerín, 2018a, pp. 13-32.

⁸⁰ *La Guinea Española*, 1170 (25 March 1944), p. 95; Rubiés, 2013, pp. 7-9, 112; d'Armegol, 2015, p. 36; interview with Josefina Rofes, 8 October 2019.

⁸¹ *Homenaje a la Antigüedad en la Guinea Española* Barcelona, Casa de la Guinea Española, 1962; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, February 1966.

⁸² Rubiés, 2013, pp. 18-19; Garcia, 1999, pp. 31-32; Ramírez Copeiro del Villar, 2004, pp. 128-129.

arrived settlers became small traders both in Fernando Po and Río Muni⁸³. There were some Catalan doctors as well.

In the 1940s, Catalans were the largest group within the Spanish population of Santa Isabel, followed by Andalusians, Gallicians and people from Madrid. In Río Muni Catalans were also the largest community, ahead of Canarians, Gallicians and Basques.⁸⁴ Later, in 1959, Francesc Recasens Mercadé wrote an article in the *Diario de Barcelona* claiming that colonization of Guinea 'is being carried out, at least a seventy per cent of it, by people from our region'.⁸⁵ The CGE Newsletter confirmed in 1960 that 'the largest group of farmers and traders established in Guinea are in or come from Barcelona'. Claretian missionaries praised the fact that the CGE headquarters had always been located in Barcelona, 'and in the Catalan land was born and raised, as Catalans encouraged the Spanish government's interest for these territories'. One leading Fernandino, Alfredo Jones, highlighted in a speech:

(...) the ties that for a long time have bound Catalonia and especially its capital, the most beautiful County City, with the island of Fernando Poo since when it started its life as a Colony and nothing predicted its future development as an integral part of the Spanish territory as overseas Province, have never relaxed but remain ever stronger, closer and more affectionate⁸⁶

All this did not necessarily mean that Catalans behaved as an homogeneous or closed community. Several former settlers indicate that they did not relate specifically or especially with other Catalans⁸⁷.

In the second half of the 1950s the appearance of an incipient Guinean nationalism, the decolonization processes in neighbouring colonies, and the stronger anticolonial statements by international institutions forced

⁸³ *La Guinea Española*, 906 (26 January 1936), p. 29; Rubiés, 2013, p. 165; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, December 1969.

⁸⁴ Ramírez Copeiro del Villar, 2004, pp. 55, 122-124.

⁸⁵ This article is reproduced in *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, January 1960.

⁸⁶ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, January 1960; *Homenaje a la Antigüedad en la Guinea Española*, Barcelona, Casa de la Guinea Española, 1962; *Memoria del Homenaje a D. Alfredo Jones Niger*, Barcelona, Casa de la Guinea Española, 1963.

⁸⁷ Interview with Fernando García, 10 February 2019; interview with Josefina Rofes, 8 October 2019.

a gradual shift in Spanish policies. Undecided on which path to follow, Madrid oscillated between assimilationism and a mitigated form of self-government. The first big change came in 1959 when Fernando Po and Río Muni became two Spanish ‘provinces’, although with significant legal and administrative differences compared to metropolitan provinces. At the same time, the legal separation of status between Spanish and non-assimilated Africans was abolished and, in theory, all Guineans were now equal under the law.⁸⁸ In this new ‘provincial’ era, Catalan business sectors — at least publicly — remained hopeful with regard to the future of the Guinean economy. Interviewed by the Spanish public TV, Francisco-Javier Pérez Portabella stated that ‘there are great expectations and hopes that provincialism will deliver great advantages’, as well as ‘a more intense improvement of the cultural and professional level of the indigenes’.⁸⁹

In fact, the Guinean economy continued to grow in the early 1960s, amid a higher demand of colonial products in the Spanish markets, the positive effects of the so-called Stabilization Plan for the metropolitan economy, and a significant increase in public investment in the colony’s infrastructures, education and health services. Between 1960 and 1965, Guinea’s GDP grew an average of 11 per cent per year. Cocoa, coffee and timber represented 94.4 per cent of all exports. In 1965 Africans only produced 16 per cent of cocoa, but they were the main producers of coffee.⁹⁰ The Guinean lobby maintained its pressure and demands on the Spanish government to make sure that the new legal framework did not alter the traditional protectionist policies towards colonial products. As usual, the government obliged and both the *cupo* system and tariff protection remained in place.⁹¹

The attempt to use provincialization as an alternative to descolonization was short-lived. Throughout the 1960s international pressure, led by newly independent African states, increased, and the Spanish Foreign Affairs

⁸⁸ Campos, 2002, pp. 71-85, 87-96, 98-102, 129-37; Álvarez Chillida, 2017, pp. 71-87; Álvarez Chillida and Nerín, 2018b, pp. 33-58.

⁸⁹ *Homenaje a la Antigüedad en la Guinea Española*, Barcelona, Casa de la Guinea Española, 1962.

⁹⁰ Álvarez Chillida, 2017, p. 75; Álvarez Chillida and Nerín, 2018a, pp. 17-19; *La Guinea Española* (15 June 1961), pp. 176-177.

⁹¹ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, May, June and November 1960, March 1962.

Ministry introduced new reforms and tried to avoid a clash with the United Nations and the Afro-Asian bloc. But those sections of the government around the Presidency hostile to decolonization managed to stall the march towards independence. In 1963, therefore, Guinea was granted a limited autonomy. Spanish investment in the colony continued and a new Economic Development Plan (1964-1967) was designed.⁹² Official protection of colonial producers also remained in place, including price-setting, and taxes in Guinea were kept at lower levels than in Spain.⁹³

On the other hand, economic growth began to show signs of fatigue. The 11 per cent yearly GDP growth of 1960-1965 fell to 3.48 per cent between 1966 and 1968. Private investment slowed down and some Spanish capital was repatriated.⁹⁴ The legal reforms of 1959 and 1963 had practically abolished racial segregation and had conferred some limited political rights on Africans, and this was not welcomed by sections of the European population⁹⁵. These changes and the economic slowdown translated, for the first time, into a gradual departure of Catalan and other settlers.

Both interviews with former residents and official documents reflect this trend. Fernando García explains how in 1964 'I saw that there was no future' in the colony and he went back to Spain. Two years later, the worker recruitment company where he had been employed 'was forced to close'. Sabater Pi, a scientist in charge of the Barcelona Zoo research station in the Muni, also stated that he was convinced that independence was approaching and a crisis would inevitably follow. He started packing and sending to Barcelona the station's files and collections. Agustí Lorenzo describes a growing tension after the independence of Cameroon and Gabon in 1960. Some whites, 'especially those known for having mistreated blacks', started to leave. But 'others left simply due to fear, in spite of having behaved correctly' towards Africans.⁹⁶

⁹² Campos, 2002, pp. 103-104, 187-89; Álvarez Chillida, 2017, pp. 77-80.

⁹³ ANC, Box 7. Press cuttings, 7 April 1963; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, May 1963 and February 1966.

⁹⁴ Camero Lorenzo and Díaz de la Paz, 2014, pp. 726-727; Carrasco-Gallego, 2015, p. 44; Álvarez Chillida and Nerín, 2018a, 17-19; Álvarez Chillida, 2017, pp. 79-80.

⁹⁵ Álvarez Chillida and Nerín, 2018b, pp. 53-55; *La Guinea Española*, 1535 (15 August 1960), pp. 251-252; Péliissier, 1992, pp. 122, 150-151; Tort and Tobaruela, 2003, pp. 154-155.

⁹⁶ Interview with Fernando García, 10 February 2019; Tort and Tobaruela, 2003, p. 159; Lorenzo Gacia, 2001, p. 72.

Several Spanish Ministers, such as government head Carrero Blanco himself, visited Guinea and tried to reassure the European community, but they mostly failed. Joan M. Rubiés returned to Catalonia just before the elections to the autonomous government, as he was worried about his pregnant wife. In the early 1960s Ramon Reig expressed his preoccupation with the country's evolution and the forthcoming transfer of power to African authorities. It seems that in the Verge de Montserrat coffee farm that he was managing labour costs had increased after the introduction of legislative changes in favor of employees. In 1965 the Giménez Ferrer owners closed the plantation. Some other companies appointed African 'management assistants' in order to ease relations with the autonomous government.⁹⁷

Josefina Rofes recalls growing security concerns among the Europeans, especially in 1966 and 1967 'there was some sort of fear', 'more in the continent than on the island'. The Pérez Andújar company, who 'had very good information' through their contacts with the regime's leadership, started 'investing in the Peninsula' instead of Guinea. Marina Yrayzoz left in 1964-1965 'because my father began to see weird things'. He sent her and her two single sisters to Spain. During a visit to Ebebiyín in 1967, French researcher René Pélissier noted that the white population was small, most had already sold or rented their properties.⁹⁸

Economic slowdown and political uncertainties, however, did not deter the efforts of the Catalan economic lobby. Under a new president, Ricard Fortuny Vilardell from the Agencia Fortuny, elected in 1965, the CGE tried to reach the newly-created Guinean institutions and its leaders. In June 1964, the Government Council visited Spain and spent several days in Barcelona. They met with the Civil Governor and the Mayor, and visited touristic attractions, the harbour and some big companies. They also visited the CGE where Pérez-Portabella expressed the institution's wishes that 'the Autonomy would be the link that will bond us all in an unbreakable and efficient union, that will not only avoid difficulties, but will consolidate a true brotherhood between races and tribes'. The Council's President, Bonifacio Ondó, reaffirmed his love for Spain and his appreciation for its role in Guinea.

⁹⁷ Rubiés, 2013, pp. 206, 227-229; Aixelà, 2019, pp. 45-46, 59-62; Fleitas, 1989, pp. 147-148.

⁹⁸ Interview with Josefina Rofes, 8 October 2019; interview with Marina Yrayzoz, 3 October 2019; Pélissier, 1992, pp. 168-169.

Ondó was again received by the CGE when he visited Barcelona in May 1966.⁹⁹

In an international context of falling cocoa prices, Guinea's producers were as dependent on the official protection of Spanish markets as ever. In June 1966 prices were again set above world rates.¹⁰⁰ By then, Guinea was the fifth largest African producer of cocoa, following Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Cameroon.¹⁰¹ Coffee exports also benefited from the protected Spanish outlet, and continued to grow until 1967.¹⁰² Timber exports were three times larger than in the 1950s and new forestry concessions were being awarded.¹⁰³

After an accelerated and somewhat convoluted constitutional process, in September 1968, the last pre-independence elections resulted in the victory of Francisco Macías, the candidate most hostile to Spanish interests, and on October 12th the independence of Guinea Equatorial was declared. In spite of the existence of political agreements that envisaged the continuation of close links between the new Republic and the former metropole, Spanish-Guinean relationships deteriorated very quickly.¹⁰⁴

Between February and March 1969, a diplomatic clash and a failed coup by opponents to Macías led to threats and attacks to Spanish residents and companies. This was followed by a quick exodus, as Spanish military and police units evacuated most of the Spanish population. It seems that by the end of April around 5,000 Spanish residents had been evacuated, and just a few hundreds remained.¹⁰⁵ In a few weeks, the Catalan presence in Guinea was almost erased.

⁹⁹ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, June and August 1964, February 1965, May 1966.

¹⁰⁰ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, January, February, March and July 1965; July 1966.

¹⁰¹ *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, February, March, July and November 1967, March and June 1968; Sundiata, 1996, pp. 3, 183.

¹⁰² *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, May and July 1964, November 1965, December 1966, March 1967 and June 1968; ANC, Box 5. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of the Casa de la Guinea Española, 26 November 1965.

¹⁰³ Liniger-Goumaz, 1988, p. 37; Guerra Velasco and Pascual Ruiz-Valdepeñas, 2017b, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Campos, 2002, pp. 309-316; Álvarez Chillida, 2017, pp. 85-87; *Boletín de la Casa de la Guinea Española*, October 1968.

¹⁰⁵ De Mendizábal Allende, 2018, pp. 275, 283-284; Álvarez Chillida and Pardo Sanz, 2022, pp. 201-232.

Conclusion: Catalans and colonialism in Guinea

In this paper we have analysed a specific group of white settlers in Africa, the Catalans that migrated to Spanish Guinea. We have shown how, while Catalans were largely absent from government institutions, both in metropolitan ministries and the local administration, as well as in the army and police, and, in Madrid, many Catalan political, economic and cultural movements and institutions tended to be seen as suspicious and prone to harbour nationalist ideas, Catalans became key players in the economic development of Guinea.

In a context in which Catalonia was Spain's main center of industrial development, from the beginning of Spanish aspirations in the Gulf of Guinea Catalan individuals, companies or associations lobbied the government for a more vigorous political presence in the region in order to protect and enhance trade and investments. When the opportunities for slave trading gradually diminished and the administrative action of Spanish authorities expanded, Catalan settlers and companies invested in, and ended up dominating, the main economic sector in Guinea: cocoa plantations. Later, Catalans also played a relevant role in coffee exports and in forestry concessions.

Throughout the colonial period, Catalans were an active and frequently successful lobby before the colonial authorities, due to their weight in the Guinean economy. Importantly, they managed to secure a trading and customs system that provided planters and investors in Guinea with a protected metropolitan market for their cocoa, coffee and, after the Civil War, timber. Although they were not always successful in their demands, Catalans were key to the economy of the territory and to the design of economic and trading policies by the metropolitan authorities.

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the former residents in Guinea who agreed to be interviewed. We acknowledge the assistance provided by the staff of the Archivo General de la Administración (Alcalá de Henares), Sección África, Fondo Guinea and the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Fons Casa de la Guinea Española. Finally, we thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editors for their comments and suggestions.

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