



N° 7 Illustration et discours scientifiques. Une perspective historique

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Photographic Anthropological Portraits in British Scientific Journals, 1860-1930

« Photography (...), as an abstract ideological practice "chameleon-like", adopts the ideological perspective of the institutions that employ it », Elizabeth Edwards claims in a seminal volume on anthropological photography¹. Even when used in a given context, photography remains multifaceted. To further the understanding of its role as anthropological illustration, we purport to scrutinize photographs printed in the *Anthropological Review* (which, in 1872, became the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, and in 1907 the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great*

¹ E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology, and Museums*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2001, p. 11.

Britain and Ireland)², a publication which straddles the fields of ethnology, anthropometry, anthropology, and archaeology.

The colonial discourse surfacing in anthropological photography has been widely studied³. Notwithstanding its alleged directness, photography was a cultural as well as a visual tool that contributed to constructing otherness in a colonial or imperial context, "transposing and transforming realities observed through a cultural grid of interpretation."⁴ It has been hailed as "the final culmination of a Western quest for visibility and scrutiny. It stands at the technological, semiotic, and perceptual apex of 'vision,' which itself serves as the emulative metaphor for all other ways of knowing."⁵ Within such a theoretical framework, photographs are threatening penetrations⁶ and the camera may be construed as a predatory weapon. Susan Sontag famously argued that "to photograph people is to violate them."⁷ If the colonial underpinnings of anthropological photographic enterprises cannot be denied, given the diversity of images circulating during the second half of the 19th century, generalizations prove unsatisfactory. As Edwards contends, "the rubric of the colonial gaze has tended to obscure differentiated intention, production and consumption of images, homogenized under the notion of 'anthropological.'"⁸ The examination of a limited corpus of anthropological photographic portraits can provide a clearer understanding of the uses of

² The London Ethnological Society, which was founded in 1843, and its rival, the Anthropological Society, created in 1863, merged in 1871 to become the Royal Anthropological Institute.

³ E. M. Hight and G. D. Sampson (ed.), in *Colonialist Photography, Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, New York, Routledge, 2002, connect photography to Western imperialism, emphasizing "the pervasiveness of the symbolic and scientific uses of photography for the verification and justification of colonial rule", p. 2.

⁴ N. Bancel, P. Blanchard, G. Boëtsch et al., *Zoos humains, au temps des exhibitions humaines*, Paris, La Découverte Poche, 2004, p. 324.

⁵ C. Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography", in E. Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920*, Yale UP – The Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1994, p. 74.

⁶ See P. Virilio's *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, London, Verso, 1989.

⁷ S. Sontag, *On Photography*, Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, New York, 1977, p. 14.

⁸ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

photography even though the circumstances in which the images were shot often remain obscure.

In the late 19th century, though anthropometric portraits were the norm, different types of photographic portraits were printed in the *Anthropological Review* at a time when photography had no proper identity as a medium yet. Many photographic studios were set up in the colonies by Westerners or local photographers. From the 1860s onwards, as cheaper reproduction techniques facilitated the printing of illustrations, targeting an ever-expanding readership, spates of images of the exotic other circulated⁹, whether it be commercial illustrations and posters of fairs or shows, exotic *cartes-de-visites*, illustrated travelogues, magazines, or newspapers. As human specimens were rare, the same photographic portraits, at times shot on the occasion of colonial fairs¹⁰, could be used in scientific and popular contexts¹¹. In the same way, ethnographical photographs were widely disseminated in non-scientific contexts and influenced the production of popular photographic portraits of non-European peoples: "images circulated in colonial and anthropological places of observation, libraries, salons and albums held by the European and American bourgeoisie, laboratories and scientific museums, cross-fertilizing, overlapping and legitimating each other."¹² Ethnologists and anthropologists collected wide arrays of photographs which they used as "isolated' anthropological facts."¹³ These overlapping uses of popular and scientific photographs of foreigners must be borne in mind when analysing the portraits printed in scientific journals.

⁹ See B. Street, "British popular Anthropology: Exhibiting and Photographing the Other", in Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, pp. 122-131.

¹⁰ The success of colonial exhibitions and ethnic shows provided opportunities for scientists to photograph exotic specimens. See Barthe, "Ethnographic Stage, Backdrop and Props", in P. Blanchard, G. Boëtsch and N. Jacomijn Snoep (ed.) *Human Zoos, The Invention of the Savage*, Paris, Actes Sud – Musée du Quai Branly, 2012, p. 160, and Bancel, *Op. cit.*, p. 307.

¹¹ Bancel, *Op. cit.*, p.12.

¹² Edwards in Bancel, *Op. cit.*, p. 323

¹³ R. Poignant "Surveying the Field of View: The Making of the RAI Photographic Collection", in Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, pp. 42-73, p. 44.

Photographers did travel to distant lands but came back with few images. Though the photographic process in anthropology was promoted, the camera was still a cumbersome tool¹⁴, daguerreotypes proved arduous to make, and photographing in distant places remained strenuous. Despite such difficulties, photographs were used in ethnology and anthropology long before they were printed in journals. Museum collections were reproduced thanks to the daguerreotype process. Owing to the paucity of human material available for scientific measurements and classification, photographs constituted substitute materials¹⁵. Photographs, which became instrumental in taxonomic anthropology or salvage ethnography, were shown at the meetings of the Ethnological Society¹⁶. Photography was then equated by some scientists – though not by all of them – with non-interventionist objectivity¹⁷. However, from 1863 to 1880, only a handful of illustrations and diagrams were printed in *The Anthropological Review*. Engravings and lithographs, which could be reproduced from photographs, remained the easiest conveyors of scientific knowledge¹⁸. The first photograph to be published in the journal, illustrating an 1877 article by W. Wyatt Gill ("On the Origin of the South Sea Islanders") but not referred to in the text, is a group portrait of islanders in front of their huts¹⁹. Featuring a white man in colonial costume, it gives an insight into power-relations. In-the-field photography developed only in the 1880s once photographic technology had become simpler.

A brief perusing of the *Review* is sufficient to show that photography was neither rapidly nor unreservedly adopted as an objective means of

¹⁴ See Franck Spencer, "Some Notes on the Attempt to Apply Photography to Anthropometry during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century", in Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, pp. 99-107.

¹⁵ C. Barthe, *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁶ Poignant, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

¹⁸ S. Maresca, "Spécimens ou individus? Les usages incertains du portrait photographique", *L'Homme*, n°198-199, 2011/2-3, p. 69.

¹⁹ In 1878, only one photograph and very few engravings were printed in the *Journal*. If the author of an 1879 article on the mode of preserving the dead in Darnley Island in South Australia (vol. VIII) was able to include two photographs of mummies, it was because the bodies had been acquired by the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

representation in scientific contexts; nor was it used consistently as our analysis of anthropometric type portraits, full-length anthropological or ethnological portraits, and group portraits will demonstrate.

Anthropometric Type Portraits

Very much like drawings or engravings, photographs served a purpose, a vision, sometimes an ideology. Gliddon and Nott, in their 1850 *Types of Mankind*, used illustrated tables to back up their polygenist arguments. As Roslyn Poignant notes:

by the 1860s an essentially Prichardian ethnology, which had attempted to establish a typology of the diverse races of mankind, was being gradually transformed by the Darwinian revolution in scientific thought into an anthropology that applied systematic methods of classification to produce developmental models of social evolution that were in essence hierarchical²⁰.

Produced in this context, type portraits did partake of a taxonomic and racialist project.

Non-photographic type portraits predate photographic ones. They are characterized by a focus on the bust or the face as well as by multiple views of the same person from different angles. Serving Darwinian anthropology, engraving facilitated the enhancement of common facial characteristics to abstract common physiognomic traits and racial types. In an 1868 article from the *Revue*²¹, a series of human and animal heads is drawn to illustrate the author's argument that "in her production of organic forms Nature has obviously advanced from lower to higher, from the simpler to the more complex, from the coarser and ruder to the finer and the more complex, from the less to the more specialized." The Turan type (Persian) is identified as the lowest type of man remaining north of the tropic. The juxtaposition of small-scale faces supports a hierarchical understanding of races. Scientific

²⁰ In Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

²¹ J. W. Jackson, "Iran and Turan", *Anthropological Review*, vol. 21, April 1868, pp. 122-154, pl. 135.

ethnological drawings documenting body ornaments followed the same compositional conventions while providing stereotypical and homogenized images of ethnic groups. Drawings were nonetheless valued as scientific evidence. In his article "On the Kubus of Sumatra," H. O. Forbes, who had examined some of the people and obtained a cranium as well as a skeleton, included four outline drawings representing a woman's features "very truthfully."²² Conversely, in 1857, George Gliddon bemoaned the lack of accurate representations of the branches of mankind and noted that while engravings recorded details of dress, artists habitually Europeanized the physical features of native people²³.

Anthropometric photography was influenced by these scientific drawings insofar as they were understood as true-to-life and scientific by the viewers²⁴. "Photographic representation was firmly based in established pre-photographic ways of seeing"²⁵ so that "photography should be viewed as a continuation of this illustrative tradition both in functional and representational terms."²⁶ However, on account of its realistic appearance, photography could back up scientific discourses more convincingly. In the 1850s, Louis Agassiz commissioned a series of daguerreotypes documenting the anatomy of black slaves and backing up his polygenist theories²⁷. Though these frontal studio portraits of bare-breasted figures are shot against plain backgrounds, the expressive gazes of the sitters and their poses evoke non-scientific portraits.

Departing from artistic aesthetics, new photographic methods were developed to "record, document, and describe within the boundaries of certain

²² *JAIIGBI*, vol. 14, 1885, pl. X, fig. 2.

²³ J. Falconer, "Ethnographical Photography in India 1850-1900", *Photographic Collector* 5 (1), 1984, pp. 16-46.

²⁴ See Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁵ P. Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1981, pp. 11-18, quoted in Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁶ Edwards, *Ibid.*

²⁷ See Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes", *American Art*, vol. 9, N° 2 (Summer, 1995), Chicago University Press, pp. 38-61.

perceived standards of logical rigour and observational skill.”²⁸ Anthropometric photographic portraits were conceived according to standardized compositions to facilitate the observation and measurement of specimens of races. As many of the practitioners in anthropology had a scientific background in the natural sciences or medicine, the parameters of visual representation that they defined were conditioned by their initial ideas of visual truth²⁹. In 1869, John Lamprey, who conceived his system for both scientists and artists, required two full-length images: frontal and in profile. He advocated that all subjects should be photographed naked, in stiff anthropometric poses, and recommended the use of a metrological grid as a background³⁰. The very same year, Henry Huxley, who considered Lamprey’s method as flawed, made further recommendations³¹, notably on the poses and the distance between the sitters and the camera. To prevent emotions from interfering, the subject should not look at the photographer. In both systems, the European figure served as a reference while the grid culturally shaped the image³². Minute recommendations were transmitted to colonial governors heading photographic surveys throughout the British Empire to ensure that shots could serve the comparative projects. The systematic photographic record of the populations of the British Empire, undertaken by The British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1878, fulfilled an illustrative and authoritating function³³. In anthropometric portraits, otherness was ideologically staged³⁴; the bodies were strictly adjusted and controlled³⁵; the colonial races “under

²⁸ Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁹ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³¹ F. Spencer, “Some Notes on the Attempt to Apply Photography to Anthropometry during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century”, in Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, pp. 99-107, p. 100.

³² In 1909, Alphonse Bertillon and Dr Arthur Chervin wrote a text giving precise directions to those who tried to use photography scientifically : *Anthropologie métrique : Conseils pratiques aux missionnaires scientifiques sur la manière de décrire des sujets vivants et des pièces anatomiques – Anthropométrie, photographie métrique, portrait descriptif, craniométrie* (Imprimerie Nationale, Paris).

³³ See Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

³⁴ S. Maresca, *Op. cit.*, pp. 83-94.

³⁵ Poignant, *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

photographic surveillance" "were 'forced to yield to the minutest scrutiny of gestures and features.'"³⁶ Nakedness, which was a prerequisite, gave a false image of the natives, very few of whom would actually go naked in their natural environments.

Notwithstanding these scientific requirements, very few photographs conformed to this "oppressively scientific, dehumanizing" anthropometric practice³⁷ as indigenous people, who were not easily manipulated, were understandably reluctant to be photographed in stiff poses and unclothed³⁸. In the *Review*, very few photographic portraits strictly follow the established anthropometric norms, which confirms that "what emerged in a number of cases, in an effort to comply, are photographs in a more negotiated style of what might be described as 'scientific reference.'"³⁹ Such negotiated portraits continued to be printed well until the 1930s, at a time when physical anthropology had been replaced by social anthropology, suggesting that representational conventions may outlive scientific theories. Following the advice forwarded in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (first published in 1874), in 1882⁴⁰, Edward Horace Man included a couple of anthropometric photographic portraits at the end of his report on the Andaman Islands⁴¹. In a subsequent article on the anatomy of the Nicobar islanders⁴², Man used a series of photographs representing the islanders in front and profile, back to back standing against not a grid but a plain background (**figs 1 and 2**). A specific section describes the plates using the phrase "typical natives of..." Man, who championed the use of the camera in anthropometry⁴³, used these double

³⁶ Hight, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁷ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.* p. 139.

³⁸ Maresca, *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁹ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁴⁰ In the second edition of *Notes and Queries* (1892, edited by Garson and Read), one may read that "only two views are of any use in anthropography, namely the full face and the profile" (p. 235). Section n° LXXVII is devoted to the practicalities of field photography.

⁴¹ "On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands", *JAIGBI*, vol. 12, 1883.

⁴² "The Nicobar Islanders, part I", *JAIGBI*, vol. 18, 1889.

⁴³ Portman, who was first appointed to the Andamans in 1879, also practiced anthropometric photography. In 1889, he entrusted the British Museum with a series of photographs of

portraits to evidence physiological similarities between selected individuals. However, in his photographs, the poses are not homogeneously controlled. The portraits of Asaba men in John Parkinson's 1906 "Notes on the Asaba People (Ibos) of the Niger"⁴⁴ apply anthropometric methods so loosely that the anatomy of the sitters cannot be seen clearly (**fig. 3**). Though the background is not neutral, it gives very little information: the four men are posing in an almost allegorical African meadow, bringing to mind the stereotypical backdrops of studio photography. As can be inferred from these examples, contrary to engravings, which erase physical differences between members of the same ethnic group, photography unwittingly foregrounds individual variations. Parkinson's photograph confirms his observation that there is "a considerable difference in the native types, since we find on the one hand a light-coloured, tall and slimly-built race, on the other, one darker, shorter, and more heavily built," unsurprisingly adding that "of the two the latter appears far the less intelligent." In many cases, photographs invalidate classificatory anthropometry. Even in articles displaying a rigorous anthropometric approach, the portraits are not strictly anthropometric. In "The Aborigines of Sungei Ujong," F.W. Knocker connects the plates to tables where skin colour, hair, shape of face, lips and prognathism are indexed but is unable to conform to the rules of anthropometric portraiture and shoots the subjects clothed and from a high angle⁴⁵.

Most illustrations do not follow scientific recommendations. The set of portraits illustrating a 1904 article by J. Deniker on the diversity of the European population and printed on a single page, display very different semiological characteristics: the double portraits of a Portuguese and a South Bulgarian follow anthropometric codes but other bust portraits are expressive

Andamanese aborigines that were conceived to illustrate his texts. Photographs were systematically inserted in his volumes. His portraits of Andamanese are in keeping with anthropometric standards.

⁴⁴ *JAIIGBI*, vol. 36, 1906, p. 315.

⁴⁵ *JRAIGBI*, vol. 37, 1907.

individualized studio portraits or *cartes-de-visites*⁴⁶. The precise captions describing racial sub-groups compensate the unscientific nature of this sundry collection of photographs. The author certainly used what photographic source he had at his disposal, disregarding semiotic relevance and scientific codes. Strange hybrid images, the symptoms of a "visual slippage, in terms of function, between scientific and aesthetic photographic discourses"⁴⁷, were common. Other studio photographs are used in the articles published in the *Journal*⁴⁸. In these cases, the sitters become scientific "specimens" only because the caption directs the processes of interpretation.

The overall scarcity of anthropometric portraits in the *Review* may be accounted for by several factors. As previously suggested, in spite of Bertillon's and Galton's endeavours to guarantee objectivity through new series of codes and methods, it became clear that photography enhanced rather than erased individual particularities⁴⁹. Besides, concerns emerged over the quality of evidence produced by fragmented photographic surveys⁵⁰. Photography was also said to be too dependent on lighting⁵¹. Its use in anthropology was debated both among the members of photographic societies and among anthropologists⁵². As early as 1882, one could read that "photographic portraits do not, as a fact, assist materially in the definition of racial characteristics."⁵³ Later on, Franz Boas, the American pioneer of modern anthropology,

⁴⁶ "Les Six Races composant la population actuelle de l'Europe", *JAIGBI*, vol. 34, July-December 1904, pp. 181-206.

⁴⁷ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴⁸ "The Teeth of Ten Sioux Indians", Wilberforce Smith (*JAIGBI*, vol. 24, 1895, pp. 109-116) includes a photograph of a Sioux with the indication "Portrait from Cabinet Photograph." In "Notes on the Samoyads of the Great Tundra" (*JAIGBI*, vol. 24, 1895, pp. 388-410) the photographic portraits come from "The Great Frozen Land", Messrs. Macmillan & Co., 1895.

⁴⁹ Edwards, 1990, p. 240 and Maresca, *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁵⁰ Edwards, 2009, *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁵¹ W. H. Wesley noted as early as 1866: "Science owes much to photography, and photography is no doubt capable of much improvement; but I still think that the work of the artist will never be altogether dispensed with, nor be superseded by any merely mechanical process", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 4, pp. 120-126.

⁵² Edwards, 2009, *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁵³ Ira Jenkins, "Franz Boas and Photography", *Studies in Visual Communications*, 10:1, 1984, pp. 2-60.

challenged the alleged realism of anthropometric photography⁵⁴. Even before the slow demise of anthropometry, the use of anthropometric portraits triggered much scepticism.

The gradual disappearance of anthropometric type portraits is also due to a growing awareness that population movements had altered ethnic purity and that pure specimens were rare. In a 1902 article on "The Kanets of Kulu and Lahoul, Punjab," the author emphasizes "racial modification due to ethnic fusion" as foreign blood had undermined the purity of the group, concluding that a large number of types are necessary to analyse the caste⁵⁵. Together with tables and figures, photographs are published but they are group portraits rather than individual ones, facilitating the perception of common physiological traits. They are commented on by the author in a section entitled "Explanation of Plates," confirming that photographs remain subservient to and dependent on text. The photographs, which were taken by Holland himself, are not presented as tools for the acquisition of anthropometric data but are used as illustrations having nonetheless an evidential role when combined with text. In a 1903 article by T.A. Joyce⁵⁶, in which the many measurement tables are complemented by group portraits, photography is used to the same purpose. The distance from which the photographs are taken, the uniformity of costumes and poses, as well as the beards, enhance the physiological homogeneity of the clan.

The third reason for the scarcity of anthropometric portraits is the gradual awareness that the rigidity of the poses distorted the figures. Alfred Cort Haddon, one of the leading anthropologists at the time, and a member of the 1898 Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait, included more individualized type portraits in his accounts. He wrote:

⁵⁴ *Nature, A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Science*, vol. 26, 1882, September 7.

⁵⁵ T. H. Holland, vol. 32, p. 96.

⁵⁶ "On the Physical Anthropology of the Oases of Khotan and Keriya", *JAIGBI*, vol. 33, 1903, pp. 305-324.

Some portraits should be taken three-quarter view or in a position that gives a more pleasing picture than the stiff portraits required by the student. (...) Some unarranged groups should be taken instantaneously so as to get perfectly natural attitudes, for it must never be forgotten that when a native is posed for photography he unconsciously becomes set and rigid, and the delicate "play" of the limbs is lost⁵⁷.

In the same volume, J. G. Garson stated that "a definite description of the countenance under any emotion or frame of mind, with a statement of the circumstances under which it occurred, would possess much value. For such investigations a "snap shot" camera will be found of great assistance when it can be used." Garson stresses that the production of anthropological photographs is an arduous task due to the transportation of heavy equipment, the strenuous measuring, the strict instructions, and the sitters' reluctance. Following these lines of argument, some articles from the *Review*, replete with physical observations and measurement tables, are illustrated with more natural anthropological type-portraits. In "Some Preliminary Results of an Expedition to the Malaya Peninsula" by N. Annandale and H.C. Robinson, a Seman man and woman, and a Siamese man are photographed in lively poses (**figs 4 and 5**)⁵⁸. Rather than homogenizing the population, the two authors describe small tribes that have developed different ways of life and racial features. They note that "measurements, more or less complete, of about four hundred individuals were obtained, about ninety of our subjects being representatives of the wild tribes" and add that conforming to the British Association's rules was "impracticable."⁵⁹ Though anthropometric portraits were quickly abandoned, the juxtaposition of two bust portraits, one in a frontal position, the other one in profile, remained extensively used even in the 1930s⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Notes and Queries, A. Cort Haddon, Third Edition, 1889, Photography Section, p. 239.

⁵⁸ *JRIGBI*, vol. 32, 1902, pl. XL, fig 1, 2 and 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 407.

⁶⁰ See "Notes on the Tribes Inhabiting the Baringo District, East Africa Protectorate" (*JRIGBI*, vol. 40, 1910, pp. 49-72); Winfried Tucker and Charles S. Myers "A Contribution to the Anthropology of the Sudan" (*JRIGBI*, vol. 40, 1910, pp. 141-163); H. Ian Hogbin, "Tribal Ceremonies at Ongtong Java, Solomon Islands" (*JRIGBI*, vol. 62, 1932, pp. 27-55) where the author writes a lively account of ceremonies but accompanies his text with pseudo-

Ethnological and Anthropological Full-Length Portraits

By the end of the 19th century, photography had become "the salvage tool *par excellence*" owing to its indexical nature⁶¹. Its use was not restricted to anthropometry.

In an 1893 issue, E. F. Im Thurn advocated

the use of the camera for the accurate record, not of the mere bodies of primitive folk—which might indeed be more accurately measured and photographed for such [anthropometric] purposes dead than alive, could they be conveniently obtained when in that state—but of folk regarded as living beings⁶².

He opposed the truthfulness of the photographic image to the ethnocentric bias in drawings:

Of old, the book illustrator, if, as was usual, he was not himself the traveller, drew as pictures of primitive folk, merely the men and women that surrounded him, and merely added to these such salient features as he was able, from the traveller's tale, to fancy that his supposed primitive subjects had⁶³.

Im Thurn keyed the use of photography to salvage ethnology explaining that educated travellers should "put on permanent record, before it is too late" what they observed. He also complained about photographs that were made of natives transported to Europe arguing that, taken under non-natural conditions, they belied the true nature of the sitters who, due to the circumstances, looked dejected and shy⁶⁴. Im Thurn concluded that

good and characteristic photographs of primitive folk in their natural condition are seldom to be obtained. Even in these days, when so many travelers carry cameras, and when a considerable number of these have skill in using their

anthropometric portraits, which may suggest that the placing of such images had become a mere convention.

⁶¹ Edwards, 2009, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁶² "Anthropological Uses of the Camera", *JAIGBI*, vol. 22, 1893, pp. 184-203.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

cameras, the photographs of natives thus obtained are neither as many nor as good as might be expected⁶⁵.

To provide scientifically useful photographs, living with the people and gaining their confidence was thus necessary⁶⁶. In this article, the photograph of a reclining young man is accompanied by a caption which names the sitter: "Gabriel, the child of a red-skinned mother, a Warrau, and a black father." The caption and the text show the anthropologist's uncommon interest in individualized subjects. Im Thurn argues that photographs of subjects in natural situations can be more telling than words and extols "the great and wonderful powers of the camera."⁶⁷ He also encourages the practice of photography to document the use of objects⁶⁸.

In the early 20th century, natural poses were increasingly preferred to stiff stances. The portraits illustrating an article on the Kavirondo and the Nanadi⁶⁹, enhance the body ornaments and costumes but show young women (Jaluo Girl, Kajulu Tribe, or Lumbwa Woman) in fairly natural poses. Even though the sitters are still identified by their ethnic types rather than by their individual names, there is some liveliness in these portraits. In the same way, the photographs printed in a 1907 article, "The Bahima: A Cow Tribe of Enkole in the Uganda Protectorate," suggest some intimacy and confidence between the photographer and the people. The sitters are smiling and cast friendly looks at the photographers.

A large number of photographs in the *Review* document costumes, body ornaments, properties, and customs or traditions. Material culture was known through a spate of illustrations printed in books of all sorts, the indexical nature of photographs being considered perfectly suitable for the rendering of

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁶⁹ C. W. Hobley, "British East Africa: Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi", *JAIGBI*, vol. 33, 1903, pp. 325-359.

artefacts⁷⁰. Both Alfred Cort Haddon⁷¹ and Im Thurn agreed that presenting objects in context was of great interest.

Accordingly, artefacts are foregrounded in some photographs even though outline drawings of handicrafts are preferred to photographs, which offer too many details. Photographs may nonetheless have an explanatory function, as is the case in "Note on the Preparation and Use of the Kenyah Dart-Poison Ipoh,"⁷² illustrated by a series of photographs on the making of a poisoned arrow. In this context, both drawings and photographs derive their meanings from the elaboration of a series, their ordering and the addition of explanatory captions.

In the case of costumes, which are often so richly decorated that they may be difficult to draw, photographs are preferred. The photograph signed L. H. L. Huddart, Esq. printed in "Notes on the Asaba People (Ibos) of the Niger"⁷³ clarifies the complex textual description: "the distinguishing mark is a circle of broom (termed Aziza, from the palm tree), knotted before and behind, with upturned ends a couple of inches or so in length." The face of the chief is partly hidden by the azuzu, "a circular fan made of untanned cow-hide, usually ornamented with red cloth strips or some similar decoration, and a short thin handle." In many portraits, the rigid stances, the inexpressive, shy or hostile gazes of the costumed sitters betray their reluctance to be photographed in garments that are worn only on special occasions. For want of visual contextualization, the sitters may be turned into objects of curiosity and fail to hide their discontent (**fig. 6**⁷⁴). The captions, describing only the dress, may heighten the disindividualization at work in the photograph. They may also, in some cases, draw our attention towards an object which does not

⁷⁰ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, pp. 54-55: "the photograph functioned as an imprint of object operating in a rhetoric of transparency and truth".

⁷¹ "Photography and Folklore", *Folklore*, 6, 1895, pp. 222-4.

⁷² C. G. Seligmann, *JAIGBI*, vol. 32, 1902, p. 242.

⁷³ John Parkinson, *JAIGBI*, vol. 36, 1906, p. 315.

⁷⁴ Orokolo Men. Rev. J. Holmes, "Notes on the Religious Ideas of the Elema Tribe of the Papuan Gulf", *JAIGBI*, vol. 32, 1902, pp. 418-425.

occupy a central place in the image, suggesting that the photograph was not originally meant to accompany the text⁷⁵.

As Joanna C. Scherer explains, "the visual in Western culture is often associated with intuition, art and implicit knowledge, while the verbal is associated with reason, fact, and objective information."⁷⁶ Implicit information may be conveyed by the background. Artistic as well as pseudo-anthropological portraits often integrate the characters into landscapes which offer a counterpoint to industrialized European cityscapes. In studio portraits, backdrops imitating Western landscape painting were commonly used satisfying "the Victorian taste for escapism and possessions."⁷⁷ J.W. Lindt's photographs of Australian aborigines display stereotypical backgrounds which are prime examples of European primitivism⁷⁸. Anthropological photographs could be shot in similar settings⁷⁹. Commercial ethnological photography could borrow from genre scenes or orientalist painting, and be included in an anthropological volume, as is the case in William Johnson and William Henderson's studio portraits⁸⁰. Their scenes featuring traditional objects are imbued with exoticism and Orientalist sensitivity.

⁷⁵ In H. R. Tate's "Notes on the Kikuyu Tribe of East Africa" (*JAIIGBI*, vol. 34, 1904, pp. 255-265) one of the plates (a photograph signed R. Meinitzhagen) features a man squatting on the ground. The caption, "Kikuyu Finger Rings" incites the readers to focus on a detail in the photograph.

⁷⁶ "The Photographic Document: Photographs as Primary Data in Anthropological Enquiry" in Edwards, *Op. cit.*, 1994, pp. 32-41, p. 32.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁷⁸ In the 1880s and 1890s, many locally-established professional photographers, like Julius E. Muller, who had an open-air studio in Suriname, made many full-length portraits of indigenous population using painted backdrops.

⁷⁹ In the 1870s, Carl Dammann, who had been commissioned to do a series of anthropological photographs by the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, photographed people from Amazonia in stereotypical settings. His album, published in Germany and England in 1874, *Anthropologisch-Ethnologisches Album von C. Dammann in Hamburg*, enjoyed a wide success among the public but elicited less enthusiasm among Parisian scientists ([see an example on the site of the Expositions de la Bibliothèque nationale de France](#)).

⁸⁰ Their photographs, taken in Bombay for *The Indian Amateur's Photographic Album* (1856-1859), were subsequently integrated into one of the earliest anthropological works making direct use of photography. See Johnson & Henderson, BnF, département des Cartes et Plans, Société de géographie, Sg Wd 279 (44). Hight and Sampson, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

In fact, very few illustrations in the *Journal* are aestheticized. Published in the *Journal* in 1902 to illustrate an article on the ethnography of the Nagas, the portrait of a "Headman of Naogong in War Costume" shows the figure against a background that resembles painted backdrops (fig. 7). The landscape hardly gives the readers any clue as to the circumstances in which the costume is worn, or the number and social origin of the warriors⁸¹.

In the full-length portraits published in the *Review*, the characters are often shot against a neutral background which enhances ethnographic details. A comparison between two drawings of the Nilgiri Hills people, but produced for different publications (figs 8 and 9), reveals that contrary to the frontispiece of the travel book, which borrows from pastoral landscape painting, the plate illustrating Major W. Ross's paper on "The Aboriginal Tribes of the Nilgiri Hills"⁸² neutralizes the setting. The isolated figure, the plain background, and the even lighting are distinctive modes of representation⁸³. The framing of photographs also focuses on the figures rather than on their surroundings to facilitate ethnological observation. The photographic portraits illustrating H.R. Tate's "Notes on the Kikuyu Tribe of East Africa" are shot against neutral backgrounds, to evidence that "As young unmarried youths are looking out for their future wives at this time, a good deal depends upon the effect of their toilet at these dances, which are called Rua. It is at these dances that the ndomi or shoulder shield is worn, as shown by the accompanying photograph" (fig. 10)⁸⁴. The absence of visual contextualization is counter-balanced by minute textual descriptions.

In most portraits, the absence of spatial or temporal context heightens the allegorical and allochronic value of the representation as identified by

⁸¹ In an 1875 article by T. G. B. Llyod, "On the Beothucs" (*JAIIGBI*, vol. 4, 1875, pp. 21-39), a tribe of Indians is represented in a canoe. The image can be likened to some paintings of the American West.

⁸² *Anthropological Review*, Art II, by Major W. Ross King, *Journal of Anthropology*, ed. John Beddoe, 1870-1871, London, Longmans, Green, and Co, pp. 18-51, n°1 July 1870.

⁸³ Edwards, *Op. cit.*, 2001, p. 143.

⁸⁴ *JAIIGBI*, vol. 34, 1904, pp. 255-265.

Fabian: "photographs become symbolic structures, reifying culturally-formed images as observed realities."⁸⁵

New Framings, New Approaches

Visual conventions gradually evolved towards greater individualization and contextualization. These changes in the framing of the scenes reflected theoretical shifts. In the *Journal*, few individualized portraits leave room for psychological individualization: even when the sitters are photographed in natural poses and when their faces, in close-up, are stamped with emotions, the caption dictates another reading by focusing on the social status or the costume of the sitters. The portraits illustrating an article on the natives of Fakaofu (Bowditch Island)⁸⁶ are an exception. One of them is identified as "The King of Fakaofu wearing the emblem of royalty"; another portrays "The Queen of Fakaofu in full face" (figs 11 and 12). Yet the other tribe members portrayed are simply identified with designations such as "a woman of Fakaofu."

In the case of two photographs published in 1905⁸⁷, the people identified and named in the caption ("The Late Chief Matzebandela with Nduna" and "A Bawenda Family") are portrayed as individuals with a given role in their communities rather than as types. As they are not mentioned or named in the text, one may hypothesize that the author had selected pre-existing images to illustrate his text. The success of exotic imagery and ethnographic photographs spurred photographers to specialize. Their portfolios were distributed to the learned scientific societies that did not systematically commission the photographs with a precise aim in mind⁸⁸. Many photographers bequeathed their images to scientific societies. The photograph

⁸⁵ Fabian, 1983, p. 117, in Edwards 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁸⁶ *JAIGBI*, vol. 21, 1892, pp. 43-63.

⁸⁷ E. Gottschling, "The Bawenda: A Sketch of Their History and Customs", vol. 35, 1905, pl. 27, pp. 365-386.

⁸⁸ Barthe, *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

of the Bawenda Family is reminiscent of Roland Bonaparte's portraits of Hottentot families at the *Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation* in Paris in 1888, which was taken in the reconstituted village of the ethnographic exhibition. The inauthenticity of the background did not hamper the scientific recycling of such images. In his review of an "Exhibition of Natives of Queensland," R.A. Cunningham reports that after three natives had been brought with difficulty from Australia and scientifically examined by several Anthropological Societies, "excellent portraits of the two adults" were made and presented to the Institute by Prince Roland Bonaparte.⁸⁹ It is very difficult to identify the image-makers behind the photographs printed in the *Review* for only a handful of authors refer to the images in a precise way. Prints and negatives were exchanged freely among photographers, there was no copyright law, and the photographic studios could be sold with the previous photographer's negatives. Authorship was not valued⁹⁰, which constitutes a major methodological hurdle for contemporary researchers⁹¹.

While anthropometric and anthropological portraits and group portraits had long been shot against neutral backgrounds, a more narrative photographic practice gradually develops. The narrative dimension and density of photograph documenting scenes and rituals seemingly grants more autonomy to the image. H.R. Palmer's article, "Kano Chronicle,"⁹² is complemented by the portrait of a Baura player photographed in costume in front of a traditional dwelling (**fig. 11**). In a 1932 article on "Witchdoctors in the Zande Corporation of Witchdoctors," by E.E. Evans-Pritchard (vol. 62, 1932), the sociology of tribes, and the division of labour are explored. The photographs show on the one hand a witchdoctor who does not adopt a frontal position and who is standing in the village, and groups of people

⁸⁹ "Miscellaneous Business of the Meeting on April 26th", 1887, *JAIGBI*, vol. 17, 1888, p. 83.

⁹⁰ Scherer, *Op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁹¹ L. Devereaux, R. Hillman (ed.), *Fields of Vision, Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology and Photography*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, p. 1.

⁹² H. R. Palmer, "The Kano Chronicle", *JAIGBI*, vol. 38, 1908.

attending the ceremony. The costume and props are therefore studied in the perspective of cultural and social anthropology. The framing and the organization of the series of images testify to this methodological shift in the discipline.

For practical reasons, there are few group portraits in the late 19th century issues of the *Journal*. Yet, in the 1880s, technical progress enabled shorter posing times so that it became increasingly possible to have instantaneous and lively images of groups of people in action. The new techniques increased the specificity of photography as a medium and heightened its supposed truthfulness⁹³. For all that, photography remained an ambiguous medium, wavering between icon and trace, allegory and veracity. The three modes which, according to Rochelle Kolodny, structure the making of images, namely the romantic, the documentary, and realism overlap in group portraits⁹⁴.

As social anthropology developed, group portraits documented the existence of rituals or ceremonies in a new way. Before photographs were used to this purpose, drawings could convey "apparently truthful" depictions of rituals⁹⁵. The photograph accompanying a 1906 article on the Asaba people⁹⁶ was shot by the author to document the ritual and the costumes described in the text. Contrary to a drawing depicting a gorilla dance and composed as a genre scene, the photograph doesn't include any white men but plunges the viewer into a ritual which is not spectacularized. In the drawing, the gorilla dance is presented as something to be watched, with women on the right gazing at the male dancers. The photographic process providing a trace of

⁹³ Sylvain Maresca, *Les apparences de la vérité ou les rêves d'objectivité du portrait photographique*, original pagination : pp. 83-94.

⁹⁴ Edwards, 1994, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁵ In February 1864, a review of Winwood Reade's *Savage Africa* was published together with a drawing depicting the Gorilla Dance (vol II, n° IV, pp. 123, second edition Elder & Co). The author notices: "Chapter XVIII contains an admirable description of the gorilla dance, together with an apparently truthfully executed drawing of the same, which has so many points of interest to the anthropologist that we are glad to be able to insert it" (p. 125).

⁹⁶ John Parkinson, "Notes on the Asaba People (Ibos) of the Niger", Vol. 36, 1906, p. 315.

what unfolded in front of the lens, guaranteed the truthfulness of the scene. In the other photographs of ceremonies printed in the *Journal*, not all the sitters face the photographer, which reinforces the impression of direct recording. This type of photograph confirms that in some cases photographs "are very literally raw histories" because of "their unprocessed quality, their randomness, their minute indexicality."⁹⁷ However, although the constructedness of photographs may be masked by their realism, the presentation of a handful of photographs documenting one small part of the real life of the indigenes contributes to isolating the image from the flow of life and concentrates the meaning of the scene depicted: "the central act of photography is the act of choosing and eliminating."⁹⁸ It is undeniable that

In the creation of an image, photographic technology frames the world. (...) The photograph isolates a single incident in history. It can make the invisible visible, the unnoticed noticed, the complex apparently simple and indeed vice versa. Photography aided the reification process as creations of the mind became concrete, observed realities, recorded in the mechanical eye of the camera. (...) The inevitable detail created by the photographer becomes a symbol for the whole and tempts the viewer to allow the specific to stand for generalities, becoming a symbol of wider truths, at the risk of stereotyping and misrepresentation⁹⁹.

Though photographs create fragments of reality, those printed in the review could be part of larger sets or albums of images. Misconceptions and misrepresentations are not to be blamed on photography as a medium. Anthropological films equally transcribe rather than merely record or archive facts.

Owing to the significant differences between the usages of photography in the articles, drawing general conclusions about the role of photography in anthropology is not possible. The analysis of this restricted corpus testifies to the complexity of this tool used in the porous field of

⁹⁷ Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹⁸ John Szarkowski, quoted in Edwards, 2001, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Edwards, 1994, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

scientific culture. The issues of undetermined authorship and scientific recycling of photographs are important methodological obstacles. Besides, no consistent chronological evolution in terms of visual choices can be sketched even though the shift from physical to cultural anthropology accounts for the increasing presence of unposed group portraits which paved the way for cinematic recordings.