

If anthropology was once considered the handmaiden to colonialism, filmmaker and anthropologist Javier Fernández Vázquez uses form to deconstruct power structures that forced their way into recorded history.

In *A Storm Was Coming*, Vázquez investigates an incident that occurred in 1904 on the island of Bioko in Equatorial Guinea. Spanish missionaries were moving in and colonial police were terrorising the locals, but Esáasi Eweera, the king of the Bubi community that is indigenous to the island, was resisting the oppressive Europeans. Something then happened in the dead of night that was far more sinister and brutal than the Spanish authorities reported.

The town of Moka has layers of memory. There is the Moka that Vázquez reveals to us now, through static landscapes and deteriorated visuals. There is the Moka that the colonisers claimed and photographed. And there is the intersection where these two points in time are brought into a sensory dialogue. Erasure is embodied by the texture of the film, as is the damage of overexposure.

Deteriorated archive images develop out of overexposed whiteness to be consumed once again by the bleached void; a photograph flashes on the screen, disappearing before you can engage your gaze; a double-exposure wavers between Moka now and the Moka recorded by colonialists. The ghosts of racist infrastructures haunt how we engage with what we see today, and how we take the privilege of a gaze for granted.

There is intentional visual absence in sections of *A Storm Was Coming*, as descendants of the Bubis express in interviews with Vázquez how they want to be represented. Through these oral histories and a sensory ethnography of space, the narrative builds layers of history over the present, revealing how trauma continues to resonate through time.

The shared communicative memory is more insightful than the tenuous and incomplete dossiers, which reveal nothing but egotistical drives and manipulative excuses. Vázquez films men reading these documents, a vocalisation that exposes their vacuous nature: self-congratulatory, childish and gaslighting, like many voices in contemporary right-wing politics.

Gaslighting is denying someone else's reality and perceptions until they doubt it themselves, and the very ground they stand on feels unsteady. These documents refer to Esáasi Eweera as the 'so-called' king, and instead call him by another name. In present-day Moka, two men discuss how the sense of fear and belief that Moka wasn't their land stretched into this century – the tentacles of cultural gaslighting.

*A Storm Was Coming* re-evaluates what we give weight to in terms of truth and evidence, and how lines fed by officiating authorities should not be taken at face value. It is the poem spoken in the Bubi's language, written by Justo Bolekia Boleká, that illuminates the night. It names the violence and gets to the heart of a historical crime.

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