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## **Framing Coloniality: Exotic Photographs in Swiss Albums, Museums, and Public Spaces (1870s–2010s)**

**Lionel Gauthier and Jean-François Staszak**

### **Abstract**

This article examines how displaying colonial photographs determines their meaning. Our study is based on a historical analysis of the social life of a photographic collection made by the Swiss traveler Alfred Bertrand (1856–1924), which was exhibited in different contexts. First, it was shown by the collector himself in his museum and at his lectures. Then, in 2007, it was exhibited in the Geneva Ethnography Museum. Finally, we discuss the problems of mounting an exhibition of the photographs, which we are planning to do in the Parc Bertrand. These three different framings give a colonial meaning (or not) to the photographs, through a series of ideological and curatorial agendas.

**Keywords:** Alfred Bertrand, collection, display, exhibition, Postcolonial

### **Theoretical and Methodological Issues**

In this article we explore the question of photographic coloniality, not through the ideologies of production but rather that created through or involved in museal use and the reception of the image. The role played by museum displays in constructing the meaning of exhibited objects is now well recognized by museums themselves. Indeed, the first point by which the “new museology” distinguished itself from the “old museology,” at the end of the 1980s, was precisely in its “call to understand the meanings of museum objects as situated and contextual rather than inherent” (Macdonald 2011: 2). Likewise, Mieke Bal argues: “If there is anything that would differentiate the ‘new’ museology from the ‘old,’ or plain museology, it is the idea that a museum is a discourse, an exhibition an utterance within this discourse” (Bal 1996: 214).

Following work on the theory of meaning as applied to exhibitions (Bal 1996; Kratz 2011; Macdonald 2011; Pollock 2007), we propose to contextualize a set of photographs within the space of their exhibition. The meaning of an image depends not only on the image itself and values brought to it by viewers. It is also determined by the manner in which the photograph is displayed, which is not neutral or void of purpose: “It is not possible to exhibit objects without putting a construction upon them” (Baxandall 1991: 34). In this regard, the concept of framing proves richer than that of context, in that it puts more emphasis on the interpretation, performance, and processes with which exhibition-makers are engaged (Bal 2002, 2011).

This focus raises a number of questions. In which place and in which form of display is the photograph shown? What other objects accompany it (especially other photographs)? How is it captioned? All elements of an exhibition work, together or individually, to give meaning to the objects on view. Kratz thus shows that an element as subtle as lighting can play a critical role in “the rhetorics of value,” which she defines as “the ways evaluative meanings are produced through the multiple media and communicative resources combined in an exhibition” (Kratz 2011: 25–26). How are such elements used by curators to frame photographic objects and establish preferred readings in a specific exhibitionary context?

The exhibition of the images, and thus their potential, is multiple as they are shown in different contexts. Consequently, each of these framings, and thus the meanings given to images, particularly

the nuance of their coloniality, must differ. From this perspective, to consider the coloniality of a photograph requires tracing its history as an object (Edwards and Hart 2005), analyzing the various circumstances in which it has been displayed (or removed from view). To what extent do different framings enhance or elide what is seen to be “colonial”?

## The Bertrand Collection

We demonstrate this process here through a study of the collection of photographs assembled by Alfred Bertrand (1856–1924), a prominent Genevan traveler. His collection has the advantage of having been shown in distinct spatial and temporal contexts. Originally shown in the collector’s personal museum and displayed at his lectures, the photographs were recently again displayed in 2007 at the Geneva Ethnography Museum (MEG). Finally, the photographs will be organized and displayed again by us in 2013, in a public space, again in Geneva. These photographs also complicate the debate on coloniality, having been collected by a Swiss citizen and exhibited in Switzerland, a country itself without an empire, but as we shall discuss, a country integrated into networks of colonization.

Inheriting a large fortune, Bertrand dedicated his life to travel. He undertook two round-the-world trips (1878–79, 1907), a hunting expedition to Kashmir (1882–83), three exploratory trips in southern Africa (1895–96, 1898–99, 1908–09) and dozens of voyages through Europe. In the course of these journeys he collected photographs, ethnographic objects, and *naturalia*.<sup>1</sup> The photographs, now held at the MEG, comprise 1,720 images. Most were purchased by Bertrand (beginning in 1874, the date of his first voyage to Germany), and a smaller number, 137 images, were taken by Bertrand himself in Kashmir and southern Africa.

The photographs collected by Bertrand came from the studios of professional photographers who began to appear in tourist destinations (Cairo, Yokohama, Calcutta, etc.) from around 1860. Such photographs were merchandise, produced in accord with the tastes and expectations of potential customers, including landscapes, antiquities, local people, and “ethnic types.” Thousands of images of these predecessors of postcards were sold, principally to tourists and visitors, across the globe.<sup>2</sup>

Bertrand used his photographs in various modes of display. The images that he himself took or obtained from travel companions were presented essentially in three ways: projections of glass lantern slides for lectures, museum displays, and publications. These photographs functioned like documents, participating in the construction of a knowledge of the world in the form of explorer narratives and scientific-geographic discourses. The photographs that are our focus here constitute a fourth form, those photographs purchased by Bertrand and placed by him in albums.

## 1874-1924: Geographic Documents in Bertrand’s Albums

These albums were central to his construction of knowledge and a foundational stage in their social biography. Bertrand displayed his albums during his lectures and in his personal museum. The large size of the albums suggests that these were tools of display, needing to be placed on a table and flipped through before a group, rather than objects of intimate contemplation (Edwards and Hart 2005: 11).

Bertrand’s albums were not scientific documents, but more like travel diaries or assemblages of memories. Nonetheless, images such as these were absorbed into scientific discourse. Bertrand’s images from travel provided a sense of the voyage itself and the authoritative statement: “I saw this.” The photographs thus participated in a narrative where Bertrand was the hero. The albums contributed to the prestige of Bertrand. They have fine leather bindings and gold lettering. The first page of each album featured Bertrand’s name, establishing his authorship, and the date of the voyage, elegantly penned. They were displayed in the personal museum that Bertrand set up in his house in Geneva. This museum, which featured collections of ethnographic objects and *naturalia*,

further contributed to Bertrand's heroic image. Though the photographs purchased by Bertrand were hardly unique statements in that such photographs could be obtained from photographic agents in Europe, the captions he added lent authenticity and the authority of direct experience. Thus, in annotating a photograph by Samuel Bourne "Traveling upriver following the sixth bridge (Srinagar)," <sup>3</sup> he showed that he knew the place at first hand. The use of the gerund in the caption even adds confusion as to who the author of the photograph was, suggesting erroneously that it could have been Bertrand himself.

The photographs in the albums do not hold meaning simply in individual terms. The collection as a whole conveys meaning, both as a project and by the way images are associated, creating a narrative through their combination and order as one leafs forward through an album.

Bertrand announces and reproduces a worldview through his choice of photographs. He acquired those that pleased him, those that accorded with his vision, and perhaps most of all, those he would like to share later. This selectivity is evidenced in part by images then circulating but absent in Bertrand's collection (did the relatively small number of erotic photos in the albums reflect his Calvinism?). Yet what logic informed his choices? An initial group corresponds to picturesque or exotic sights: monuments or spectacular landscapes, both typical and unusual scenes, captivating portraits. These singular images illustrated the variety of the world, projecting a strange but enticing realm beyond the familiar. A second group of images follows the logic of an inventory and seemingly aims to capture reality by collecting samples, at times banal, yet comprising a geographical collection: human types and vegetation, means of transportation, human activities, and so forth. The overall effect of these assemblages, however, is to construct a world where the presence of the Westerner—traveler, scholar, missionary, colonist—is legitimized. This sense also results from the juxtaposition of images evidencing the ostensible barbarity or backwardness of the local populations (a photograph of a Chinese woman with deformed feet, for example, captioned "Small Chinese feet") and images of technical progress (bridges, railroads, and colonial infrastructure) or moral advancement (missions) achieved through colonization.

The creation of meaning takes place in the specific ordering of the albums, which is also a classification of the world. Bertrand put together sixteen albums. Each bears a title designating a geographic space ("British Indies") or stages of a journey ("Aden, Lower Egypt, Naples, Marseilles"). Only Italy escaped this logic, in that one of two corresponding albums bears the title "Masterpieces of the Galleries of Italy." This album appeals explicitly to an aesthetic reading of the photographed objects—which include paintings by Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, or Titian—that stood for a universal cultural meaning independent of any local specificity. The photographs of the other albums are all organized according to the places they depict, which the viewer follows in the same order in which Bertrand had seen them at first hand—city by city, region by region.

The juxtaposition of images within the albums takes mainly two forms. Some of these groupings followed a typological logic, with the type illustrated drawn from an inventory of recognized variants (Figure 1). Other associations rested on a logic of specificity. Grouping heterogeneous views of local curiosities whose only common denominator was to belong to the same place, these pages built the meaning of the place by capturing its very uniqueness (Figure 2).

Beyond the organization of the albums and the juxtapositions established, Bertrand also assigned meaning to specific images by adding captions. In line with the racist theories of his time, he collected images of human types. It was in the adding of captions, such as "Arab" or "Muslim," under individual portraits, that such typification occurred. In this sense, if Bertrand had omitted his caption "Preanger Java girl" (Figure 3), the photograph might have been read merely as a portrait or artistic nude.

This raises the question as to what extent Bertrand himself might have been involved in colonial thinking. Bertrand was a great admirer of “the English system of colonisation, which is practical, full of common sense, and able to adapt itself to all circumstances and places” (Bertrand 1899a: 35). But he could not imagine colonization without Christianization: “Any work of civilization that does not have Christian principals at its base is harmful, introducing vices refined on the rot of paganism” (Bertrand 1899b: 101, our translation).

This raises a further question: analytically, to what extent can we consider his photographs as “colonial”? We would argue that “the colonial” is not simply located in the images themselves but it is also located in the meanings that Bertrand gave them by way of his organization, presentation, and use of the images. From this perspective, Bertrand sought to use them as geographic documents, attesting to the reality of places and his presence in them. He sought to convey the attraction of the distant and unfamiliar, while inviting others to share his experience as a traveler and explorer. But throughout, as he attempted to apprehend this exotic beyond, he legitimized the Western presence, especially the presence of religious missions. In this sense, Bertrand’s rhetorics of value participated in the colonial enterprise, assuring that the images were seen and understood in terms of a colonial ideology, which the albums promoted and reproduced.

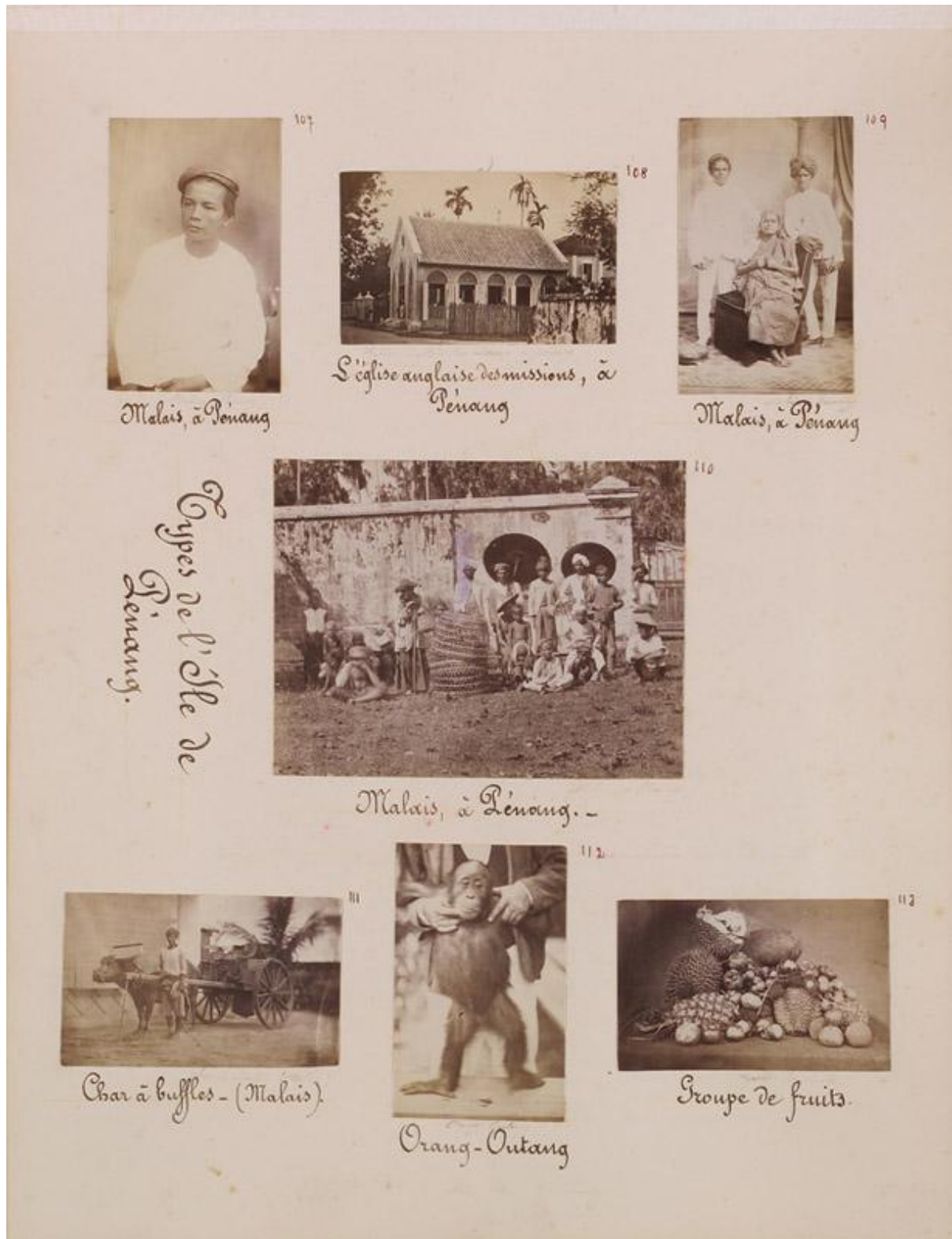
### 2007: Works of Art at the Geneva Ethnography Museum

In 2007, the photographs were displayed at the MEG as part of the exhibition “A Geneva Globetrotter: Alfred Bertrand (1856–1924).”<sup>4</sup> The first exhibition hall featured ninety of the 1,583 photographs purchased by Bertrand, and was entitled “The Making of Reality.”



**Fig 1** “Types in Singapore.” MEG, Alfred Bertrand collection, album “Singapour, Java, Ile Poulo Penang (1879),” inv. ETH PH 411704, © MEG.

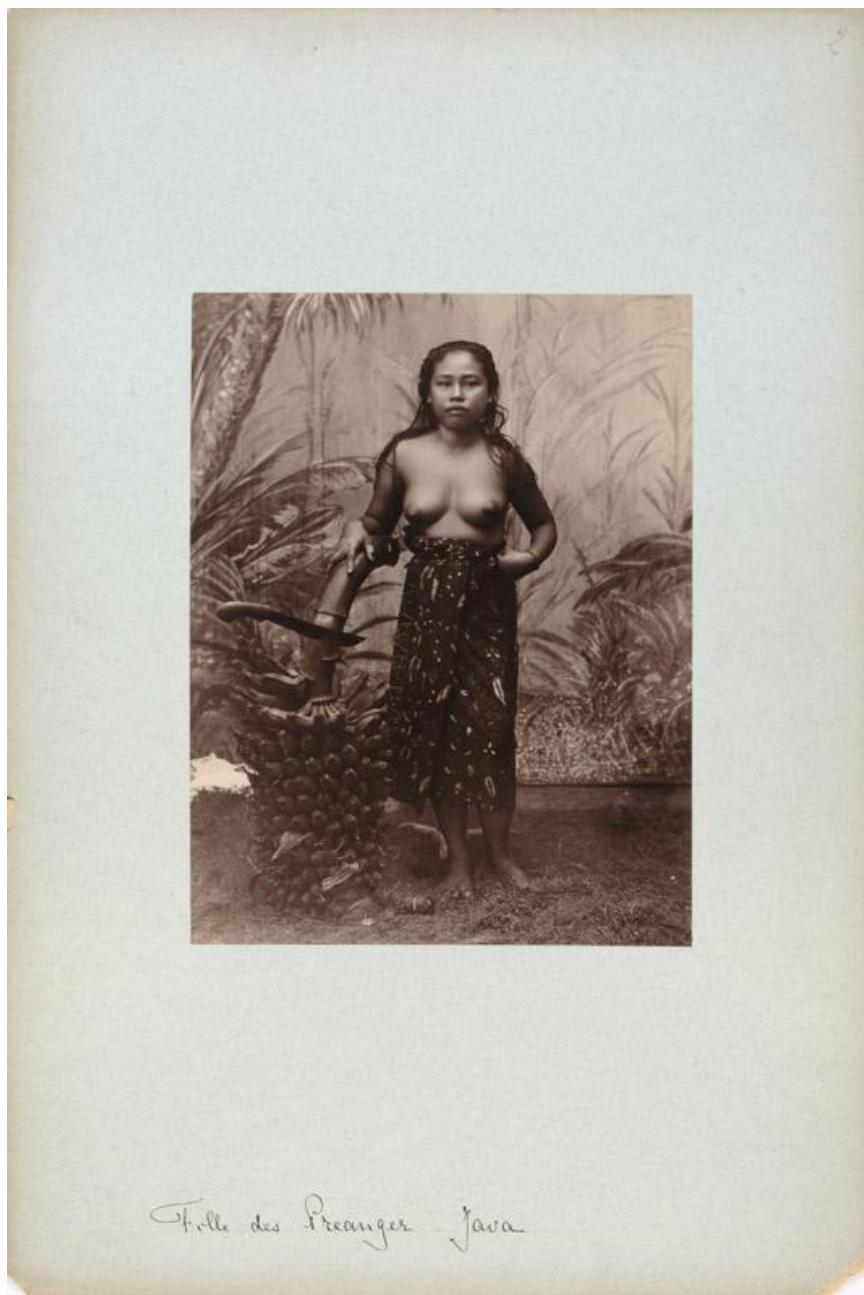
All the photographs displayed were technically outstanding: there was not a single blurred or poorly framed image. Their aesthetic quality was commensurate with the objects photographed: scenic landscapes, spectacular monuments, and beautiful human figures. The uniformly high quality of the selected images invited the visitor to appreciate the mastery of the photographer's art, and the aesthetic reading of their subjects.



**Fig 2** "Types of the Island of Penang." MEG, Alfred Bertrand collection, album "Singapour, Java, Ile Pulo-Penang (1879)," inv. ETH PH 411739, © MEG.

The visual display of the photographs conformed to this aestheticizing interpretation. The albums were disbound so that the photographs could be displayed individually, matted in white frames under glass, affixed to the walls, and illuminated by spotlights in a subdued atmosphere. Thus the photographs were presented according to norms proper to works of art.

This aestheticization was reinforced by offering the images with no text beyond that given by the photographers or annotated by Bertrand. For factual information (titles of the photographs, names of the photographers, dates, places, dimensions, etc.), visitors could refer to an attached booklet (Figure 4). In this way, nothing would distract from the view of the images, which were to speak for themselves. Even some of the captions added by Bertrand were hidden when their positioning might have detracted from this aesthetic reading: for example, the page of the album shown in Figure 3 was mounted behind a mat that covered the caption (Figure 4).



**Fig 3** "Preanger Java girl," anonymous, before 1880. MEG, Alfred Bertrand collection, inv. ETH PH 411739, © MEG.



**Fig 4** Preview of the exposition (August 2, 2007). MEG, photographed by Jonathan Watts. This photograph, taken in the first hall, shows a part of the wall with photographs from the category “Classify”, © MEG.

In removing the photographs from their albums, the curators isolated them from one another. As works of art, each photograph held value independently. The associations made by Bertrand were thus elided, and the authorship, agency, and narrative he projected through the albums were eliminated. On the other hand, the attribution of individual photographers’ work was privileged by the curators.

A new classification of the photographs was offered, breaking with the geographical organization of Bertrand. Moving from one group of photographs to the next in the museum, the visitors no longer followed Bertrand’s itinerary or the narrative of his voyage. Instead, the curators had regrouped the images according to five categories, which were reduced to keywords inscribed on the wall: “Crossings,” “Rising Up,” “Classify,” “The Unfamiliar,” and “The Wonders of the World.” The coherence of these categories did not derive from a typology (as under the geographical ordering of Bertrand), but instead from an invitation to an emotional experience. In French, these categories used the verbal infinitive, rendering (just as in English) the subject ambiguous: who was supposed to see these views as wonderful? Bertrand? The photographer? The viewer of yesterday? The viewer of today? The curators thus emphasized the universal and cross-cultural character of these experiences, and thus of the images. Far from anchoring the photographs in the specificity of a subject, a place, and culture, these categories inscribed them within a shared and universal humanity, belonging equally to the subject, the photographer, and the viewer. The categories further allowed the curators to ignore geographic groupings and to instead group the images according to genre, for example portraits (falling under the rubric “classify”) or purely graphic criteria, such as composition.

The central question posed by the display, in its theoretical approach as evident in the texts that accompany it, concerned the status of photography: is it a reflection of the real, or a point of view regarding it? In the first hall, the exhibition was introduced with the following words:

From its inception, photography was accredited with the capacity faithfully to reproduce the appearance of all things and all beings ... The resulting images were ambiguous: they reconstructed views that claimed to be authentic but in which observation and fiction rubbed shoulders.<sup>5</sup>

The question forms part of a debate as old as photography itself (Rouillé 1992): is it an art? The exhibition thus explored, from an art historical perspective, the relationship between photographer and subject, while omitting social and political context and ignoring relations of domination. The question would have been equally pertinent had the photographs depicted only Switzerland. Not a single line in the exposition mentioned colonialism as such.

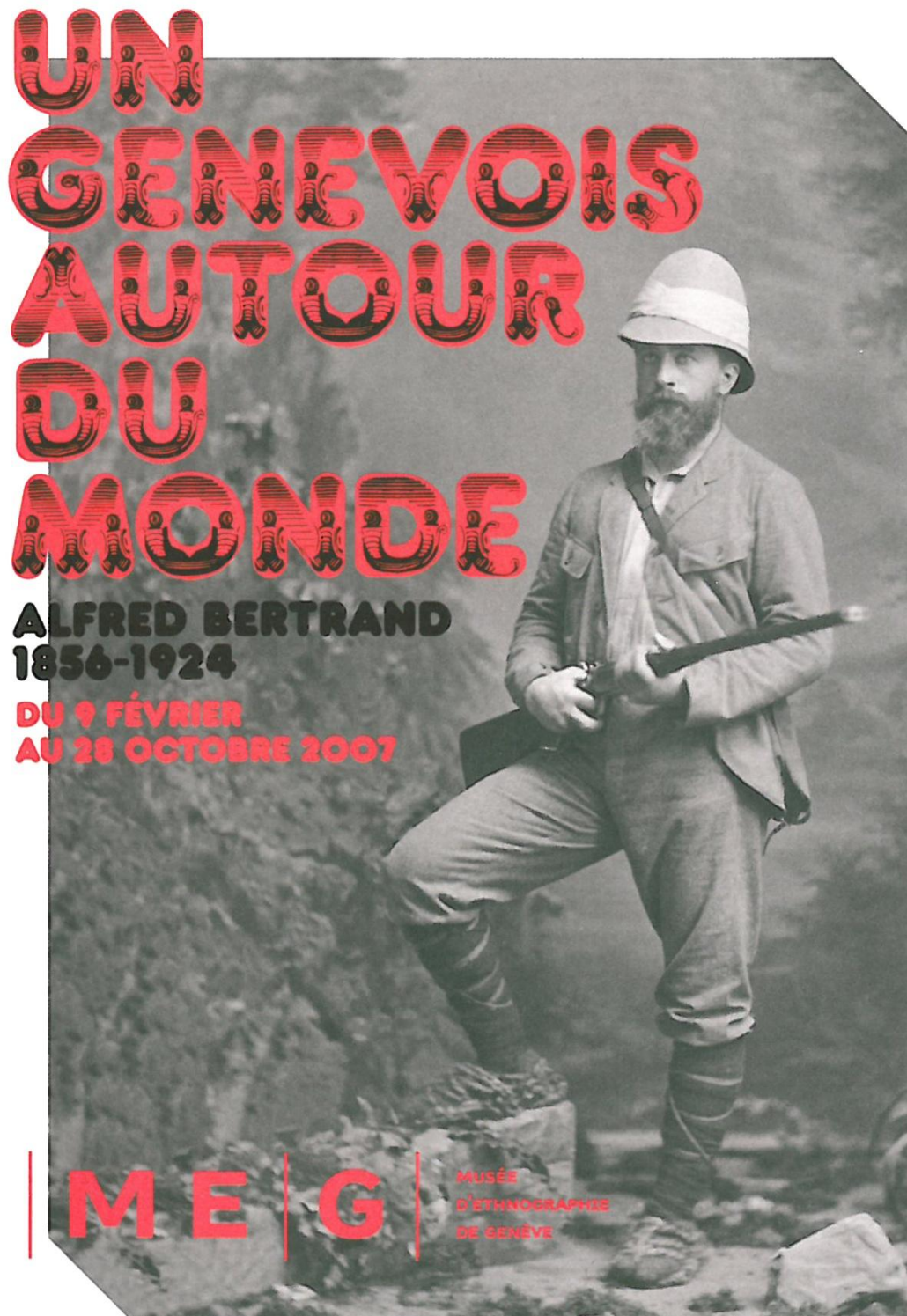
Probably unintentionally, the scheme chosen by the curators entirely depoliticized this part of the exhibition. For instance, they inserted a portrait of the Queen of England alongside that of a partially clothed Javanese woman under the category “Classify” (Figure 4). This supposedly showed human types even though a type is by nature anonymous and incompatible with individuality (Edwards 1990: 241). While this arrangement of images was a deliberate attempt to establish relationships between photographs with very different subjects, so as to highlight shared compositional and genre styles, the curators also made colonial photographic violence less visible to the visitor through establishing surface visual equivalences.

Bertrand was portrayed by the organizers of the exhibition as a figure somewhere “between explorer and tourist,”<sup>6</sup> seemingly placing him either before or after colonization. His trajectory was again made heroic: “He was not afraid to venture out alone beyond the pacified trading-posts of the new colonial empires where he faced every danger,”<sup>7</sup> and his motivations were attributed, without critical distance, to the same noble causes used during the epoch to justify colonization: “He, too, fought for recognition of peoples, and opposed slavery and trade in alcohol and opium.”<sup>8</sup>

The exhibition poster (Figure 5) was perhaps the sole element to evoke coloniality, but even here it is ambiguous. It features a studio portrait of Bertrand as hunter. He appears in colonist attire, but as an inoffensive and benign colonist— amusing, even ridiculous. This ambiguous and slightly ludic image of Bertrand as explorer/colonist is accentuated by the font chosen for the poster’s title. It recalls the typographic style of the covers of late nineteenth-century children’s books, especially Jules Verne’s *Extraordinary Journeys* series. The photograph therefore evokes the things of childhood— play, fiction, and adventure tales, almost trivializing the overt coloniality of the image.

Critical perspectives were not absent entirely from the exhibition. The display of Bertrand’s collection of photographs was followed by two rooms, each taking a very different approach. The first, entitled “In the Country of the Ba-Rotse,” contextualized the photographs that Bertrand himself had taken by including extracts from his journals and quotations from a variety of authors explaining the social and political context of Barotseland at the time of Bertrand’s visit. His photographs were situated within his advocacy of missions. The third room of the exhibition, “Showing and Being Seen,” invited a reflection on the photographic approaches to the contemporary exotic and its location. Presented were photographs by Martin Parr and Irving Penn, a display of postcards, a computer on which visitors could surf travel blogs, and a photo machine in which visitors could take photos of themselves in front of backgrounds extracted from the photos collected by Bertrand. As such, it provoked a critical reflection on the contemporary production and consumption of touristic images, and a questioning of the practices and representations of the visitors themselves. Visitors could

perhaps then reconsider the photographs of the first room in light of these critical and reflexive insights, even though the exhibition title cast Bertrand as an innocent traveler from the past.



**Fig 5** Exhibition poster, MEG, 2007. The original photograph was retouched: two corners were cut to produce an “album” effect; it was cropped and the rock on the left had its width doubled, probably to give more space for the title, © MEG.

## 2013: Colonial Representations in the Parc Bertrand

The final instance in the social life of Bertrand's images considered here has yet to take place, and it is the authors of this article who will be responsible for the way they are shown—and viewed. Our exhibition will take place in a large urban park, the former estate of Bertrand, which was bequeathed to the city of Geneva by his widow. Taking the items out of the familiar museological context, with its established and legitimating discursive logics, has consequences, however. As a sequel to the history we have related here, we intend to reflect on this new context and its implications, as the design of the exhibition aims to frame the images so as to expose their participation in colonialism and their history as representations within a specifically Western geographical imaginary.

The decision to display the images outdoors imposes constraints that weigh on the materiality of the images, the way they can be shown, and the meanings that can be imparted to them. To begin, it will be necessary to modify the size of the images, since the photographs collected by Bertrand are too small, and thus lacking in impact, to be exhibited in an open space. But enlarging the photographs also has implications. On the one hand, changing the size of a photograph to some extent “falsifies” the historical document for the visitor, obliterating the fact that these were small objects that were purchased during voyages and carried home. But more importantly, enlargement makes the images appear “more real” in that the size of the bodies and scenery in the enlarged photographs more closely resemble that of real life: they are made more present. The emotive charge of the images, be it aesthetic or erotic, is heightened, for better or for worse. Thus, in enlarging the photograph of Figure 3, the nakedness of the subject is amplified. This might demonstrate colonial voyeurism, but the greater risk is that it would repeat it, by increasing the eroticism of the image.

A number of the rhetorical tools that we discussed above in relation to exhibitions are unavailable due to the nature of an open space. The space cannot be substantially altered; thus one cannot guide the gaze of visitors as one can in a museum. Nor can the direction of the visit and thus the narrative of the panels be managed, because each visitor will be free to wander at will. As a result, the meaning of the panels cannot derive from their order, with no guarantee that visitors will see them all. Consequently, each panel needs to make sense independently.

There are, however, further implications in displaying Bertrand's photographs in an open public space, which relate to the nature of that space and people's engagement with it.

First is the relative erasure of the authors of the exhibition. An exhibition that is held in an institutional location is assumed to have been “curated” and enjoys a sense of legitimacy associated with that institution. In a public space, belonging to everyone, the exhibition does not necessarily carry such attribution and authority. Although there will be panels explaining the involvement of the University of Geneva, these are easily overlooked. This poses two difficulties. On the one hand, following our argument here, the invisibility of the authors of the exhibition is problematic because we wish to show, precisely, how the meaning of these photographs is in part determined by the choices and intentions framing their display. On the other hand, the organizers of the exhibition cannot depend on the engagement and investment of the visitors, most of whom will be general users of the park, as co-constructors of meaning.

A second effect of place relates to the perception of public spaces in Switzerland, as sites of social harmony and consensus. Parks are not a place of conflict, and an exhibition taking place there should avoid polemical issues. On the one hand, the issue of colonial memory is less charged in a Swiss context, because the country did not have an empire. Yet Switzerland, through its missions and its economic interests, was directly implicated in colonization (David, Etemad and Schaufelbuehl 2005). Thus the Swiss geographical imaginary regarding colonies and their “natives” differed little from their neighbors (Minder 2011). To evoke Swiss complicity in colonialism might prove discomforting and

confrontational in this space. This is not because the country was particularly culpable in acts of atrocity, for instance. Rather, it is because the image of a pacific and neutral Switzerland, so important to national identity, would be challenged and destabilized.

A third element, specific to this public space, is that it is the former garden of Bertrand. Gardens more generally are sites for placing works of art, such as statues, to enhance the landscape. Because of this, there is a risk that the photographs will be *a priori* perceived as works of art, and will be attributed decorative value, especially as the old images are often aesthetically pleasing. This might work against our preferred reading of the photographs. Again there are a number of possible dynamics. On the other hand, the parallels between the idea of a garden and that of a collection are strong. That Bertrand originated both garden and photographs as a form of inventory allows interesting possibilities, framing them both within the same project of representing and collecting the world. The garden and the photographic collection each are microcosms, based on representative samples. Indeed, the two at times converged. In California, Bertrand bought photographs of giant sequoias, a species that he had also planted in his park. The garden and the collection are visited and viewed in place of the world. As both projects of knowing and dominating the world, both have historical ties to colonization. It is hoped that the exhibition makes associations and connections between the photographs and elements of the park itself, for example placing images of trees from the photographic collection alongside exotic specimens that Bertrand planted in the garden and which continue to grow there.

While photographs we plan to present all have elements of the colonial gaze that we wish to elucidate, the image of the “Preanger girl” (Figure 3), a recurrent motif in this article, presents a particular and instructive problem. Its interest is, of course, the particularly revelatory nature of this gaze. It is paradoxical, however, to seek to deconstruct stereotypes by exhibiting them (Bal 1996; Pouillon 2010). In order to overcome this problem, we are considering how the panels might develop an argument about typification and eroticization. In particular, it is important to show how “strategies of innocence”<sup>9</sup> simultaneously hid and justified the eroticization of “exotic” women. First is the implication that the subject’s nakedness results not from the photographer’s intention or the desires of the viewer, but from an assumed “naturalness” of the women, stereotyped as childish, animal, or lascivious; understood as both submissive and dangerous, as the woman’s body becomes the site of moral judgment. Second, a woman’s unclothed body is positioned and legitimated as a necessity of scientific and ethnographic enquiry or to the anatomical study of the artist (Gauthier 2011; McCauley 1994), and not as the focus of the erotic fantasies of the voyeuristic Western male.

It is our task to reveal these strategies because many of their motifs and assumptions are still active and effective today, but their force lies in being unstated. Text alone is insufficient to challenge the photograph, because of the very power of images (Bal 1996; Boëtsch and Ferrié 2001) and the constraints of mounting an exhibition in an outdoor public space.

It is thus essential to devise an immediately visible mechanism to address the image. The first task, then, is to make the nakedness of “the Preanger girl” and the conditions *seen*, noticed, as something constructed and manipulated. The second is to situate it in the colonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative context that pertains. To do this, one could draw attention to the staging of the photograph, perhaps by graphically highlighting the painted backdrop, and conveying the possibility that the photographer asked the model to undress, serving a certain intention. The exposure of staging diminishes the photograph’s ethnographic weight. Our current thought, however, is to reclothe the model by digitally retouching the image. The two versions would be shown side by side (Figure 6). The viewer cannot help but note this intervention and manipulation and, we hope, question why.

We hope that this manipulation, unusual in the display of historic photographs where retouching is generally seen as unacceptable, can interrupt the gaze of the viewers, leading them to seek reasons for this alteration, and inducing them to read the text that will be provided on the back of the panel. We also want to make our curatorial intervention and presence explicit, making it clear that someone framed these photographs toward a certain end, and thus countering the illusion that the documents speak for themselves. Making our alterations obvious is another way for us to communicate our message: that the meanings of objects are constructed according to the ways they are shown. Certainly exhibitions manipulate objects and the visitors, but in line with “new museological” practice, we aim to make this evident.

### Re-framing Coloniality and Framing the Frame

We have addressed the various purposes to which Bertrand’s photographs have been put, and the way in which changing ideological and material strategies have shaped their social biography. The planned exhibition is yet another such strategy. We are framing the photographs so as to make it clear that they are colonial representations, and engage them so as to deconstruct the colonial gaze and a hegemonic Western ideology. In this regard, our exhibition marks a certain ideological rupture with the earlier exhibitions, if not an epistemological break.

Elaborating on Oberhardt’s theory of framing (Oberhardt 2001), Griselda Pollock notes that “From the inside, the museum effaces itself to become an invisible frame for the art or the artefacts it appears merely to house, conserve and exhibit” (Pollock 2007: 1). The rules of framing “conspire to neutralize, indeed naturalize, exhibition” (Bal 2011: 533). Changing the framing can certainly be relevant, but is not sufficient.



**Fig 6** Projection of display of “Preanger Java girl” (Alfred Bertrand collection, MEG) in the Parc Bertrand (forthcoming, 2013), © Crispini and Gauthier.

If our exhibition of the images succeeds in achieving an epistemological break, it will lie in our deliberate attempt to not conceal the framework in which we show the images and attempt to give them meaning. We want to make explicit, and take responsibility for, our interventions over these objects—for example by noticeably retouching certain photographs. It is as curators that we make them speak. While acknowledging and respecting the perspective and agency of exhibition visitors, our emphasis is also a response to the imperative of gender and postcolonial studies, which invites us to take into account the situated nature of knowledge and engages us to reflexivity rather than hide authorship beneath scientific strategies of “objectivity.” After all, “Exposition is also self-exposure” (Bal 2011: 529).

Our reflexive effort to make authorship and framing explicit in our exhibition, by announcing our manipulations, could itself be denounced as manipulative. No exhibition, it can be said, can escape framing, and the explicit framing that we wish to achieve necessarily takes place within a meta-framing that remains invisible. To announce one’s ideology draws in effect on a strategy that is inscribed in an ideology, and in a rhetoric of value, at a higher level (the *meta-framing*), and which also participates, albeit discretely, in the production of meaning of the displayed objects. Finally, the explicit framing of the exhibition is itself transformed into an object of the exhibition, the meaning of which is shaped by this larger frame which cannot be shown. This invisible frame structurally constitutes the blind spot of the exhibition, just as the photographer’s viewfinder constitutes the blind spot of the photograph.

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Lionel Gauthier is a research and teaching assistant in the Department of Geography and Environment at the University of Geneva. His research focuses on the construction and the circulation of exoticism. For his current doctoral research, he is working with the photographic collection of Alfred Bertrand, a Swiss traveler at the end of the nineteenth century.

Jean-François Staszak is a full Professor in the Department of Geography and Environment at the University of Geneva. His early research focused on the history and epistemology of geography, and then with economic and cultural geography. His most recent work addresses geographical imaginaries in the fields of art (painting, photography, dance, cinema) and tourism, analyzing the geographical othering process and especially the eroticization of the Exotic. His understanding of the articulation of geographical representations, practices, and realities owes much to deconstructionist theories and to postcolonial and gender studies.

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<sup>1</sup> These collections were donated in 1940 by his widow to the MEG (photographs and ethnographic objects) and to the Geneva Natural History Museum (*naturalia*).

<sup>2</sup> To categorize Bertrand's collection, 76 percent might be described as exotic photographs, in that the sites, people, or objects they depict were transformed into objects of desire by/for the Western gaze (Staszak 2008). Fifty-seven percent of the snapshots were taken in colonies and hence might be deemed "colonial photographs" in the sense that, at the time, such a category based on place was already operational.

<sup>3</sup> All the captions and titles of Bertrand are our translation.

<sup>4</sup> Following the donation of the photographs in 1940, they lay forgotten in the museum's storage rooms until they were rediscovered in 1985, during research for the exhibition "Le visage multiplié du monde" (Necker 1985). They would not be displayed, however, until 2007.

<sup>5</sup> MEG, *Dossier de presse* (2007), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Curator of the exhibition, quoted in Dumont (2007).

<sup>7</sup> MEG, *Dossier de presse* (2007), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> MEG, *Dossier de presse* (2007), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Pratt defines the term as "Strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (1995: 7).