
Supporting colonial economic policy during early Francoism: The Peninsular Delegation of the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate

● JUAN-CARLOS GUERRA VELASCO

Universidad de Valladolid

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1427-374X> | guerra@geo.uva.es

● HENAR PASCUAL RUIZ-VALDEPEÑAS

Universidad de Valladolid

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6335-2236>

ABSTRACT

During Francoism, especially its autarkic stage, Spanish colonialism in equatorial Africa found a fundamental ally in the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate and its Peninsular Delegation. From 1936, all of the colony's forest concessionaires were obligated to join. More studies are needed to reflect the role certain institutions played in Spanish colonialism during this period. This paper contributes to filling this gap by studying the activity behind the work of the Peninsular Delegation – the sale of wood. It is argued that this trade was marked by an intention. It reveals the relations, understandings, distances and antagonisms woven around the colonial project and economy, while helping to understand the complex regulatory framework that the autarky applied to the use of colonial wood.

KEYWORDS: Equatorial Guinea, okoume, colonialism, Wood Syndicate.

JEL CODES: N57; N54; Q23; L73.

1. Introduction

The productive specialisation of the Spanish colonies in the Gulf of Guinea and the development of trade flows with the metropole led to the emergence of pressure groups that attempted to organise core aspects of economic life in the colony and influence the design and execution of metropolitan colonial policy.¹

1. The development of an extroverted economy based on the extraction of raw materials is a phenomenon that characterises all of the European colonies in West Africa (Hopkins 2019).

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The effective military occupation of the continental area of the colony in the 1920s, the expansion of colonial administrative structures therein and the new direction in colonial policy that propelled the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, facilitated the development of intensive forest extractivism.² This fuelled the timber trade that governed the economic life of this part of the colony until the birth of the Equatorial Republic of Guinea in 1968 (Guerra and Pascual 2015; Pascual and Guerra 2017). Similar to what happened in Fernando Poo,³ the construction of this colonial space involved the gradual appearance of various types of institutions that represented the economic interests of the new colonial agents: the Spanish Continental Guinea Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry (1927-1928), the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate (1936), the Peninsular Delegation of the Wood Syndicate (1937) and the Peninsular Delegation for Coffee of the Agricultural Chambers of Guinea, better known as Proguinea (1946) (Suárez 1997; Lascasas 2010; Guerra and Pascual 2017; Guerra 2019).

Thus far, only the work of Sant on cocoa has studied the evolution and significance of some of these institutions, specifically the Spanish Guinea Farmer's Syndicate (Sant 2017; 2018). This text aims to contribute to expanding the scant repertoire to include the forest trade with the body that groups together all of the forest concessionaires: the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate and its Peninsular Delegation, in practice the governing body of the former.

The characteristics of Spanish colonialism in the Gulf of Guinea enable the inclusion of different perspectives when analysing the Wood Syndicate: its economic function, its ability to influence the policy applied in Continental Guinea, the role it played in the mechanisms of domination involved in colonial practice, its significance as a tight entrepreneurial network built by the forest concessionaires and its relationship with the colonial administration, among others. This study focuses on the first two aspects over a large part of the autarkic stage of Francoism. During this time, the colony's raw material supply function cannot be understood without the support of the Wood Syndicate and its ability to organise the flow of wood within the regulatory framework of economic interventionism of early Francoism.

2. In the text, the terms "Continental Guinea" and "region of Muni" are used interchangeably to refer to the mainland area of the colony. In colonial literature, they have become synonymous despite officially referring to different territories, in which the latter is contained within the former.

3. Cocoa growing and trading in Fernando Poo triggered an intense organisational shift, bringing together small and large landowners, traders and the colonial administration, with varying levels of agreement. These included the Fernando Poo Agricultural Chamber in 1906; the Delegation of the Chamber in Barcelona (1908); the Fernando Poo Farmers' Syndicate, later the Spanish Guinea Farmers' Syndicate (1923); the Spanish Colonial Agriculture Syndicate (1934); the Cocoa Syndicate Committee (1934), and the House of Spanish Guinea (1941).

The documentation shows how this framework can only be understood – beyond its generic adherence to the principles of autarky – by taking into account the existence of a conflict and the interests and capacity for exerting pressure of those contending in it; in other words, the forest concessionaires through the Peninsular Delegation of the Wood Syndicate and the plywood board manufacturers, organised initially under the official Spanish Association of Plywood Board Manufacturers, and later included in the National Syndicate of Wood and Cork.

The bulk of the documentation comes from the General Archive of the Administration (Archivo General de la Administración – AGA), specifically from the Africa Fund (Presidency and Commissioner-General of Guinea series). However, this documentation is not the archive of the Wood Syndicate or that of the Peninsular Delegation; it is unlikely to be a substantial part of what both must have produced since it was not possible to locate their archives and they have more than likely disappeared. It is only the documentation that reached the colonial administration as a result of the procedures that it implemented or channelled through the Syndicate’s intervention mechanisms. Consequently, the AGA has a significant number of minutes that recorded the meetings held until the early 1950s. That said, there is a drawback: in 1945, when the Delegation’s executive committee was created, the dialogue-rich content that the secretary produced was replaced with a summarised and discursively poor list of agreements, only qualified by occasional appendices attached to the minutes. Other documentation used in addition to the AGA documentation, for some partial aspects, comes from the archive of the Francisco Franco National Foundation (Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco – AFNFF), the Santander Port Authority General Archive (Archivo General de la Autoridad Portuaria de Santander – AGAPS) and, finally, the Santander Municipal Archive (Archivo Municipal de Santander – AMS).

2. From the Spanish Continental Guinea Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry to the Wood Syndicate and its Peninsular Delegation

As stated, the 1920s marked a change of course in the exploitation of the Muni region. Regulatory changes in 1926 removed the presence of foreign commercial companies and stimulated the emergence of Spanish financial capitals, that geared themselves mainly towards the timber trade (Pascual and Guerra 2017). In just a few years, a level of productive activity was established in Continental Guinea that gave rise to a colonial elite on the continent, as was the case with cocoa in Fernando Poo. In 1927, this elite founded the Spanish Continental Guinea Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry – recognised by the Royal Order of 29 September 1928 – and just under a decade lat-

er the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate too (Official Gazette of the Colony, BOC, of 15 November 1936). The former amalgamated forest and agricultural concessionaires and commercial companies operating in the Muni region;⁴ the latter only included forest concessionaires.

The documentation relating to the Chamber that was consulted in the AGA cannot be used to fully assess how it worked from its creation to that of the Wood Syndicate. As such, it is also not possible to analyse how forestry was managed or to understand the thinking that led the Chamber to put the proposal to form the Wood Syndicate to the colony's Governor-General.⁵ As a result, the Order of 15 November 1936 issued the ordinance to create the Syndicate, mandated the inclusion in it of all of the forest concessionaires in Continental Guinea, and established its autonomous operation whilst still belonging to the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry. Out of the catalogue of spheres of operation with which the Chamber began, the defence of syndicate members, the promotion of cooperation among them, and dialogue with the administration in forestry legislative developments of a concessionary or tax nature were reserved for the Syndicate. In turn, three new tasks were set out: the inclusion of advance-payment transactions to forest concessionaires against the timber shipments that they carried out; the creation of a delegated sales committee in Hamburg (at that time, the main port of entry for tropical wood in Europe and the traditional point of sale of Guinean wood), and the ability to physically intervene in the concessions to ensure that they were used sensibly.⁶

The Syndicate's objectives, its operation and the relationships it forged at the various levels of the colonial and metropolitan administration varied over time, or rather, they were not perfected until the arrival of the structures of the new state after the military uprising of 1936 and the end of the civil war. The weak legal, administrative and organisational framework offered by the ordinance that gave rise to the Syndicate was reformed soon thereafter. The most consequential changes took place between 1937 and 1940, determining the profile that it maintained until it was dissolved in 1970.

First, an order of the Technical Board of the State removed the Delegation in Hamburg, although it acknowledged the possibility that commercial representatives could be appointed in foreign ports. This resulted in the representation in Hamburg being replaced by a delegated committee in the metro-

4. AGA 81/8100.

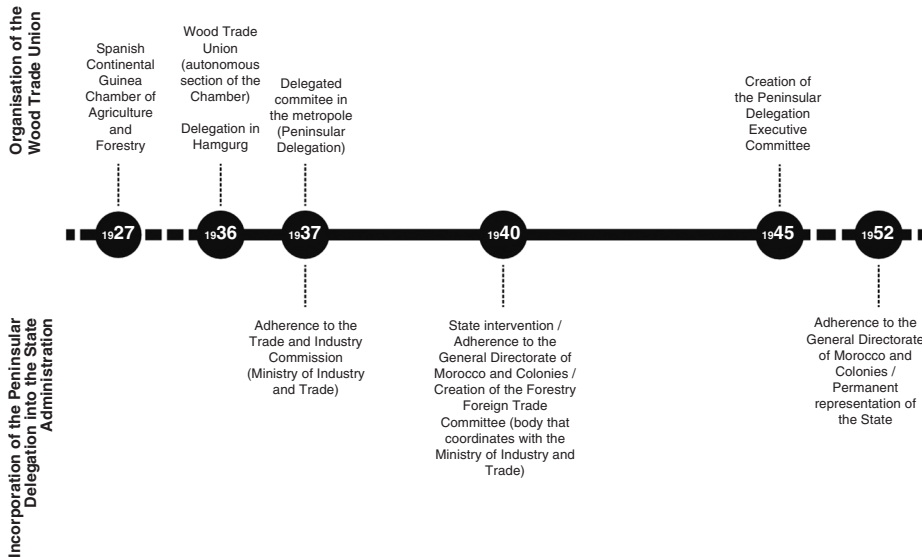
5. AGA 81/12304. Some documents highlight the difficulty of reconciling the commercial needs and interests of farmers and timber merchants.

6. AGA 81/12304. It is noteworthy that the Wood Syndicate assigned itself the role of intervening in concessions, which, regardless of whether or not this materialised, corresponded to the administration. It is tempting to link this fact to the weakness of the forestry administration in the colony and to the delayed construction, in the theoretical terms expressed by Young (1984), of the colonial state in Continental Guinea.

pole, which initially affected the Industry and Trade Commission, and which “[would] officially represent the syndicate and [would] be the link that binds it to the governing bodies” (Order of 2 June 1937).⁷ Thus the Peninsular Delegation of the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate was established, in practice the true syndicate (Figure 1).

Second, the adherence of the Delegation to the Ministry of Industry and Trade was amended in February 1940. Some months before, the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies underscored the unsatisfactory incorporation of the colonial delegations and services into the new State administration, primarily through the General Directorate of Trade and Customs Policy of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. This link addressed the trade issues that the Syndicate had to tackle, but it ignored the central aspects of the presence of forest companies in the colony, such as concessionaires and taxpayers. The State intervened in the Peninsular Delegation of the Syndicate, which was subject to the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies, although the Delegation maintained the relationship with the Ministry of Industry and Trade through the Forestry Foreign Trade Committee.⁸

FIGURE 1 • *Evolution and context of the Wood Syndicate*



Source: created based on the AGA (81/8100 and 81/12304) and the Official State Gazette.

7. AGA 81/12304.

8. The Forestry Foreign Trade Committee was tasked with proposing prices, regulating shipments, distributing export quotas among each of the timber merchants, keeping export statistics, and serving as the General Directorate of Trade’s auxiliary body in matters relating to imports of materials for forestry operations (Official State Gazette, BOE, of 3 February 1940).

The presence of the State in the Delegation took the form of an intervention carried out by the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies, which was replaced in 1956 by a permanent representation appointed by the Presidency of the Government (BOE No. 71 of 11 March). In both cases, the State was given the power to suspend or veto any Peninsular Delegation agreement deemed “contrary to the public interest or the interests of the national or colonial economy”, adding powers in its 1956 redrafting that directly influenced the commercial organisation of the forestry trade and the direction of the colony’s production: the option to impose on members of the Peninsular Delegation the presence of international experts in wood classification if arbitration was required at the request of a buyer, and the stimulation of production by increasing exports of several types of wood and, specifically, hardwoods for railway sleepers.⁹

The documentation consulted reflects the fact that no new changes were made to the structure and operation of the Wood Syndicate, but also that its life did not end with the birth of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in October 1968, or with the events of February of the following year. However, the latter led the logging companies to cease operations in the former colony shortly after and caused the Peninsular Delegation to agree to its dissolution in 1970, resulting in a request by it to overturn the Order of 2 June 1937 by which it had been created.

In this brief review of the key milestones in the operation of the Syndicate/Delegation, it seems necessary to point out that, whilst in 1941 the arrangements that were made to create a single colonial syndicate (which was never brought to fruition) were transferred, both were excluded from the vertical organisation of the work that was imposed shortly after the Spanish civil war ended (Aparicio 1980; Bernal 2010). In a way, the Wood Syndicate was part of those business structures that, despite their formal prohibition, were tolerated and continued to operate throughout Francoism (Toboso 2017).

The story of the Wood Syndicate is actually the story of its Peninsular Delegation. The institution was intended to be a colonial (in the broadest sense of the word) one, but it became metropolitan through the significance that the Delegation acquired. This shift was acknowledged early on by the administration in the colony. Unsurprisingly, in June 1940, the Governor-General informed the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies that “the Delegation is not a Delegation, but rather a Syndicate and the real Syndicate

9. It seems appropriate to note that several years prior, the requirement to supply a sufficient volume of railway sleepers to RENFE was transferred to the Peninsular Delegation (AGA 81/12304).

is the real Delegation”.¹⁰ The chief engineer of the Forestry Service expressed a similar idea, albeit with harsher language. According to him,

[...] everything is being done to ensure that the Wood Syndicate does not operate in the colony – where it should logically operate, as it is more in touch with the situation there – but in the metropole instead, where it would appear to operate more like a trust of producers than an actual syndicate within the rules of the new State. It seems that the Delegation is in control now.¹¹

Regardless of the opinion of the engineer, which must be interpreted bearing in mind the political, social and colonial thinking that is reflected in many of his reports (Guerra and Pascual 2017; Guerra 2019), his vision of the reality of the Syndicate demonstrates a structural feature of the forestry trade: the prevalence of extensive financial capitals (Pascual and Guerra 2019). The importance of the productive means that wood extraction required led to a high concentration of industrial capitals, with only a few companies leading the forestry trade (sometimes forming conglomerates or united through strategic groupings) and supported by significant financial capital represented by banks, including Banco de Bilbao, Banco Central, Banco Exterior de España, Banco de Cataluña, Banca López Bru and Banco Hispano Colonial (Pascual and Guerra 2017). This was the case for companies like Izaguirre, Sociedad Colonial de Guinea, which later became Sociedad Colonizadora de Guinea (SOCOGUI), Compañía Agrícola e Industrial de la Guinea Española (CAIGE), AGGOR, Productora Hispano Colonial (PROHISCO), Colonizadora de Guinea Continental (COGUISA), Juan Jover, Compañía Vasco Africana, Maderera Peninsular and, above all, Compañía Nacional de Colonización Africana (ALENA).

This depicts a production activity in the colony that had a significantly different business structure from that of cocoa production in Fernando Poo (Sant 2017). Small amounts of capital were not represented and without them the small concessionaire located in the colony – the direct protagonist of colonial practice – does not appear either. As the logging companies’ command centres were located in the metropole, it is not unusual that, over time, the Wood Syndicate in Río Benito was reduced to a bare-bones administrative structure, manned by Spanish personnel hired in the colony, and subordinated to the decisions taken by the Peninsular Delegation. This became an aid to colonial policy and one of the operation centres of the colonial forestry economy.

10. AGA 81/8152.

11. AGA 81/8152.

3. The commercial value of Guinean wood

The utilisation of colonial wood was directly related to research into its physical qualities, comparison of its qualities with those of the timber used in the metropole, and to technical developments in the industry that processed this wood. The mechanical properties of the wood determined the existence of industrial applications to showcase them; ultimately, they guaranteed the possibility of a market for them and, from a business standpoint, the profitability of the logging operations. In turn, the extraction of wood is influenced by the silvicultural features of the forest: tree masses made up of a high number of species, but with a low representation of individual specimens per unit area or, in other words, a low density of species with commercial value that grow among many other species with no commercial value (Dargavel and Johann 2013).

The most noteworthy species is okoume (*Aucumea klaineana*). Its mechanical properties (lightness and high resistance) and its high yield in the unrolling process to obtain rotary cut boards make this wood an essential raw material in manufacturing plywood board. The commercial use of okoume began in the final decades of the nineteenth century in the colonies of French Equatorial Africa (Laserra 1955). By the late 1920s, it had become a flourishing business in Spanish Continental Guinea. From then and until the start of the civil war, practically all of its timber production involved logging okoume. The majority of the production was directed towards the German market, where the booming plywood board industry was absorbing an increasingly large volume of okoume. This market was largely supplied by okoume from the French colony of Gabon. In this market Guinean wood became more and more prominent: in 1926, okoume from the Spanish colony represented 16% of German imports (15,000 of 95,000 Tm), and just ten years later this share had risen to 36% (62,000 of 170,350 Tm) (Pascual and Guerra 2017).

However, there was a gradual depression in the German okoume market throughout the 1930s. The French government implemented restrictions on forest clearing, with a view to slowing down production and recovering the profitability of the business, whilst Spanish producers gradually shifted their commercial attention towards the metropolitan market. Dependence on imports from Cuba, Mexico and the United States thus fell, and a national plywood industry was developed that was able to compete with European manufacturing. Nevertheless, from 1926 to 1936, the national market absorbed a third of the colony's total okoume production, brought in mainly through the port of Valencia (Pascual and Guerra 2017).

The extraction pressure on the timber-yielding stocks of okoume from the Muni region, alongside the inability to access new forestry concessions from

1930, caused companies to become increasingly concerned about the depletion of their concessions, at a time when statements eluding to the scarcity of okoume were commonplace.¹² In turn, the idea of the comprehensive use of the forest took hold (Nájera 1930), which was at odds with the characteristics of the processing industry that okoume had created in the metropole.

In 1927, the sector comprised a mere ten factories. New manufacturing sites gradually appeared until there was a business network of some 30 facilities prior to the Spanish civil war, and just over 100 in 1950 (Zapata 2001; Pascual and Guerra 2017). However, the production framework was, for the most part, characterised by inefficient industrial organisation and hampered by the limited availability of machinery, facilities and modern technical means with which to compose manufacturing systems comparable to those that the European plywood board industry developed (Pascual and Guerra 2017).

The plywood production centres were clustered around the port areas that received and distributed colonial wood. The sector's greatest production capacity was concentrated in the ports of Valencia and Barcelona. Other significant ports were Bilbao and Pasajes, Santander and, to a lesser extent, the port of Ferrol. The origin of many of these companies is linked to the industrial tradition of the area, as is the case of Valencia, with important manufacturers like Torno, Barona, Zacarías, Belloch and Castellanos, and Vilarrasa. However, the expansion of this business network is linked to the interests of forestry producers in Continental Guinea. They participated directly, through agreements with other industrial companies, or the acquisition of functioning facilities, in the industrial processing business, and controlled the entire production process, from the extraction of the wood to the final distribution of the finished product. The main exponents were *Compañía Anónima de Productos Africanos y Aserradero de Maderas Coloniales* (Jover & Graells), *La Aeronáutica* (Izaguirre), *Manufacturas Valencianas del Okume* (ALENA), *Maderas Reunidas* (Vasco Africana and Manyani), *Marga* (SOCOGUI and *Compañía del Muni*) and *Peninsular Maderera* (Garitorenza).

As a whole, they formed a production framework, which was limited in its initial expansion due to its technical and organisational characteristics and the regular okoume supply problems that it faced. In fact, the plywood board industry developed in the metropole against a backdrop of permanent tension between manufacturers and logging companies, which considerably worsened from the 1940s given the manufacturers' resistance to using wood other than okoume. Nevertheless, the plywood industry reached a sustained

12. The lack of labourers for agricultural and forestry work led to a ruling to suspend new concessions for any kind of farming or crop, both in Fernando Poo and on the continent (AGA 81/6856).

growth rate and domestic consumption of tropical wood increased from 62,000 Tm in 1947 to 360,400 in 1966.¹³

4. Colony, wood and autarky

To understand the auxiliary nature that the Peninsular Delegation came to acquire, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the context in which the forestry activities took place in the colony after the end of the Spanish civil war. This context was marked by the following: the project that the colonial administration imagined for the Muni region; the disappearance – as a result of the Second World War – of the European markets that the logging companies used in the previous decades; the drop in okoume stocks; the institutional and regulatory framework of the economic policy during early Francoism; the vast reduction of means and capacities involved in Spain's international self-exclusion until well into the 1950s and, finally, the aforementioned existence of the plywood board industry.

The economic function that Francoism vested in the colonies of the Gulf of Guinea is well known: the production of raw materials (Suárez 1997; Carnero and Díaz 2014; Lascasas 2010).¹⁴ In the case of wood, this function was built upon its volume, based on a biased figure that the colonial administration stated repeatedly: 100,000 Tm of wood per year for the national economy. Given that this amount could not be reached by extracting okoume, a new production direction was taken, to promote the trade of other types of wood. This approach involved the governing bodies of the colonial policy, the logging companies, and the Wood Syndicate. All of them felt it necessary to overcome the dependence of the colony's forestry economy on okoume.¹⁵ The logging companies understood that the only factor that would guarantee their continuity was the industrial use of wood other than okoume. With a view to increasing the volume of wood extracted and sent to the metropole, the administration sought to increase the number of species used in plywood board manufacturing.¹⁶ Against this backdrop, limiting the access that plywood board manufacturers had to okoume forced them, in practice, to use other wood in their industrial processes.

The communications between the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies and the Governor-General clearly reflect the intention behind the

13. Statistical summary of the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies and the Statistical Yearbook of Spain.

14. A function that, conversely, is identical to that assigned to its colonies by other European countries.

15. AGA 81/12304.

16. AGA 81/8152.

measures that were implemented until 1940 and, quite possibly, those that came thereafter. In the words of the former, the governmental intervention deployed until that point responded to:

[...] a present direction (the reorganisation of the market and its preparation for more specialised companies) and a future objective (...[that] we have managed to demonstrate, through indisputable facts, the possibility and even the need to exploit the forest comprehensively, given that the national market can absorb wood that is not okoume, to determine their conditions and application.¹⁷ (AGA 81/8152)

This correspondence mentions the Peninsular Delegation of the Wood Syndicate as an institution on which the administration bases its opinion. As a representative of the companies, the Delegation expressed interests that can be summarised as ensuring the viability and profitability of the operations by using more types of wood, establishing remunerative prices, preventing wood that competed with the colonial wood from entering the Spanish market, and controlling the system of wood freight and shipping that involved okoume. It also used another significant argument for the administration: showcasing a thriving and more varied logging industry involved increasing income from the colonial treasury.¹⁸

As with the production of cocoa in Fernando Poo and chocolate manufacturing in the Peninsula (Sant 2009), okoume gave rise to antagonistic relations between forestry companies and plywood board manufacturers given the different criteria that both used to supply raw materials. Although tensions escalated during the autarkic period, in reality they existed from the moment that okoume and its transformation into veneer for plywood coincided in the metropole.¹⁹ The interests and concerns of the industry remained constant over time: continuous, stable and sufficient supply, especially with okoume wood of certain qualities and at an affordable price. As had occurred in the years prior, the main conflicts arose due to the supplied volume (often deemed insufficient), the fact that it had to be primarily okoume as it was better suited to the available machinery, and the price per tonne, which they considered too high and harmful for the maintenance of facilities.²⁰

In the strongly interventionist context of the autarky, the State established the colonial wood that had to be provided, the markets in which to distribute it and the prices at which it had to be sold. Without abandoning those premises, intervention could be, and was, expressed in different manners. The con-

17. AGA 81/8152.

18. AGA 81/8152.

19. For instance, the problems led to an *Okoume Arbitration Conference* in 1935 (AGA 81/6864).

20. AGA 81/8152.

tent of these and how they changed over time can be linked to the evolution of the autarkic policy itself, but also to the capacity that concessionaires and manufacturing companies had to exert pressure. The appearance in 1948 of a key player, the Timber Service, played a significant role in these changes.²¹ Reporting to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, it was tasked with overseeing:

[...] ‘the exploitation, distribution and rational use of wood, firewood and charcoal produced in the country and imported’, in addition to ‘setting the prices that should apply to the different phases of their production, processing and consumption and adoption of the measures conducive to achieving the most effective use thereof, as well as the qualification of the entities or persons that can acquire round wood or raw firewood that are engaged in commercial operations with wood, firewood and charcoal’”. (BOE of 20 May 1948)

Despite its unquestionable historical interest, no references were found that could explain how it acted and its impact on the development of the logging industries and on the wood market in Spain. As such, all that can be said is that, in the specific case of Guinean wood – and particularly wood that can be unrolled – plywood board manufacturers fully identified with the body of the Timber Service, because it functioned logically and operated practically. Emphasis was put on the industry’s requirements; other projects and spaces had to be subordinated to it.

The colonial administration, aided by the Peninsular Delegation, outlined a project in its communications that was imposed on the organisation of the colonial wood market until 1946. The import and export quotas for okoume in 1946 plotted a new course that was more in line with plywood board manufacturers’ interests and in which the responsibility to intervene would fall to the Timber Service. Finally, the division of the Ministry of Industry and Trade into two separate ministries in 1951, one for industry and one for trade, in addition to the relative trade liberalisation that ensued, repositioned the work of concessionaires and plywood board manufacturers both in regulatory and political terms, achieving an ostensible balance for both that continued for the rest of the autarkic period and even beyond.

The field in which these aspects appeared, through which it is possible to identify the temporary changes and the rationales that shaped each of them, was a critical one for the colony’s forestry economy, and one of its bottlenecks for several decades: access to maritime freight as a means to connect the forestry concessions and the plywood industry.

21. Created by Decree of 2 April 1948 and abolished in 1959 (BOE of 14 December) as part of the reforms that were implemented that year to liberalise the Spanish economy.

5. From the war economy to the commercial bases of 1940

In contrast to the trade flows of other European colonies (Christopher 1984; Butlin 2009), the brief development of the Spanish merchant fleet in international maritime trade manifested itself early on as one of the factors limiting the evolution of the forestry economy of Continental Guinea (Pascual and Guerra 2017). As the colonial logging companies did not have timber merchant ships that were of sufficient tonnage and adapted for stowing trunks, the bulk of the wood export trade was monopolised by large European shipping lines that disembarked in Hamburg, Bremen and Rotterdam, via the trade routes connecting to the ports of the English and French colonies of West Africa. The flow of wood abroad reduced considerably as a result of the Spanish civil war, the effects of the Second World War on international trade and the autarkic shift of the Spanish economy, but not the need to have enough vessels of the right characteristics to connect the colony with the metropolitan ports.

Of the catalogue of tasks the Syndicate was established with, organising the transport and sale of wood occupied most of its work. It is the activity that best defined the auxiliary nature the Peninsular Delegation acquired for the administration. This profile was initially developed with the participation of the forest concessionaires in the war economy that arose from 1936 to 1939.²² In November 1936, the Industry, Trade and Supplies Commission of the Technical Board of the State became interested in opportunities to regain the flow of wood to Germany (AFNFF, 4510). Shortly after, the forest concessionaires not only provided colonial authorities with the foreign currency obtained from sending wood to Europe, but also, upon expressing the Governor's concern regarding the fall in shipments in the first quarter of 1937, the Syndicate took on the organisation of wood exports.²³ Given that it only had transport for 5,000 of the 10,000 Tm of wood that the concessionaires stored in the colony, mainly in the river, the Syndicate began to look for more merchant ships.²⁴ It managed to involve those belonging to the Department of Seized Ships and, although they were unsuccessful in the end, contracts were signed with well-known consignees, such as the Woermann Line.²⁵ The instrumental function of the Syndicate was reinforced based on the contracts that the Nationalist

22. The colony remained faithful to the Republic until September 1936. From that moment on, the forest concessionaires fully identified with the ideology and objectives of the Nationalist faction. Except in the case of the Basque Country, the processing areas were on land and controlled by the government of the Republic until practically the end of the conflict.

23. AGA 81/8152.

24. AGA 81/8152; 81/8802.

25. The Department of Seized Ships was created in October 1918 and the Spanish Government, as compensation for the Spanish ships sunk by the Germans throughout the First World War, seized some of the German ships taking refuge in Spanish ports during that con-

faction established in 1938 with Italy and Germany, and in which it appears as a signatory.²⁶ These contracts aimed to provide 8,000 Tm and 35,000 Tm to Italy and Germany respectively in 1938, and 60,000 Tm to the latter in 1939 and 1940. Notwithstanding the fact that the start of the Second World War interrupted the supply of okoume, the difficulty in fulfilling the contract with Germany was such that the order was given in July 1939 to use for that purpose all of the okoume logged in the colony and replace that geared towards the plywood board industry in Spain with varied wood. A dual procedure guaranteed the monitoring of the exported wood: the obligation to supply information to the Wood Syndicate in the case of member companies, and the need to obtain a prior export permit – provided by the Syndicate too – for any wood, such as that from forest clearances by colonial farmers, coming from persons who are not members.²⁷

The order placed with the Wood Syndicate reveals the existence of certain problems regarding the sale of wood.²⁸ In order to resolve them, the colonial administration enforced the drafting of commercial terms and conditions. These became much more than the resolution of a specific problem – they are part of a project for the colony that was implemented at the start of 1940 by the recovered General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies. The most important aspect, which was settled upon drafting the commercial terms and conditions, was the framework within which the logging companies and plywood board manufacturing processors were to carry out their productive capacities.

There are four core elements of the commercial terms and conditions document that the Delegation created: the establishment of a system of import

flict. That was the case of Riga, (later Spain 5th and after that Castillo de Tordesillas), an active participant in the transport of wood at this early stage.

26. The contract with Germany was signed with Rowak (Rohstoff Waren Kompensation Handgesellschaft), the German counterpart of HISMA, a company established in 1936 to organise German deliveries to Francoist Spain and the compensation for the military assistance received (Leitz 1996; 1999; García 2007).

27. AGA 81/8152.

28. The most pressing issue was how to ship the timber, resulting from plantation farming clearances in the continent, and incorporate it into the metropolitan market. Resolving this problem meant addressing logistical problems, given the shortage of transport and the accumulation of this kind of wood produced in the colony since the start of the Spanish civil war, and also economic and entrepreneurial issues due to competing, at least temporarily, with that of the logging companies. Despite the wishes of the colonial administration and its good predisposition, the Delegation imposed its criteria by force and made it difficult for the farmers' wood to reach the peninsular ports. The farmers were not incorporated into the trade flows under the same conditions as the Delegation members. In fact, the conditions established made it difficult for the farmers to move the 14,000 Tm of wood estimated to have been logged during forest clearances to prepare the agricultural estates due to not having a fixed quota on the ships chartered by the Delegation and only the proportion of the shipment that may correspond to the Wood Syndicate was reserved for them on the regular commercial line ships between the colony and the metropole (AGA 81/8152).

quotas and coefficients for the forest concessionaires; a classification of the colonial wood; the procedure for the constitution of the shipments and, lastly, the organisation of the sales system. The import coefficients regulated which proportion of the total round wood that was sent to the metropole corresponded to each company or corporate group. To calculate this, the productive capacity was used as a reference – measured through the means that each concessionaire accumulates in the colony, and the wood extracted in preceding years. The companies ALENA and Izaguirre therefore had 50% of the wood that could be imported to the peninsula and, if that of AGGOR was added, the proportion rose to 65% (Table 1).

TABLE 1 - *Quota of export of wood that could be unrolled (in %)*

Concessionaire group	1940	1942	1944
ALENA - CAIGE	30	29	28.32
Izaguirre	20	19	18.55
VASAFRI - MANYANI	7.5 / 7.5	14.5	14.16
AGGOR	15	13.5	13.18
Jover & Graells	10	9	8.79
SOCOGUI	10	6	6
ARAOZ	3,000 Tm	3	5
PROHISCO		3	3
Elena Martín Bosch		2	2
Iradier		1	1

Source: Prepared based on AGA (81/8152).

To facilitate its position in the market and establish its prices, an agreement of the Forestry Foreign Trade Committee categorised the colonial wood into four groups based on their industrial application: fine wood; carpentry and construction; plywood board manufacturers and carpentry and, lastly, varied uses and new species.²⁹ In turn, it was understood that for shipment, the wood could be presented sawn – in the case of the first three groups – or as round wood in the case of that destined for plywood board manufacturers. The latter had to have a minimum diameter of 60 cm in the case of okoume and of 50 cm in the case of varied wood.

The new terms and conditions stated that sawn timber was for free production and sale, and concessionaires were responsible for the freight. However, the Delegation reserved the sale of the sawn shipments over 500 Tm and

29. AGA 81/12304.

supply to companies of national interest, whenever the orders exceeded 1,000 Tm.³⁰ In the case of okoume, limiting its exploitation as much as possible was established as a basic principle, and the Syndicate supplied it directly to the plywood board manufacturers in proportion to the varied wood they requested or to the norms that were established as appropriate.

At the same time, handling zones were created for the sale and supply of timber, dividing the peninsular processing space into four major markets: North I (ports of Bilbao, Pasajes and Santander), North II (ports of Asturias and Galicia), Catalonia (port of Barcelona) and Levante and Andalusia (mainly the port of Valencia), of which Izaguirre and AGGOR, ALENA, Jover & Graells and, in the latter case, ALENA, Vasco Africana, Manyani and Socogui were respectively in charge.³¹

In terms of transport, once the concessionaires transferred all the chartering contracts they had already signed to the Delegation, their price was unified based on the rates in force in the Mediterranean ports, in other words the highest prices. Lastly, each shipment had to contain wood from the least possible number of logging companies, geared wherever possible towards a single handling sector and, to correct deviations in the amount of wood shipped by each concessionaire, a system of compensations was established for returns, in other words the complete cycle of departures of all the vessels chartered to the colony (initially five) and their return to the metropole.³²

The regulations meant that the Delegation had full control over the sale of the wood from the colony and particularly the one most in demand – okoume. However, the new regulations could not be understood as simply the prevalence of the corporate vision of the forest concessionaires. They formed part of a rigid project that, although generally overlapping with the interests of the Peninsular Delegation, was promoted by the colonial administration with the main support of the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies and in the knowledge of the general government.

30. The processing of sawn wood also incorporated the possibility that it could be shipped on vessels chartered by the Delegation, which benefited the companies with saws in the colony, such as ALENA, Jover & Graells and Izaguirre.

31. The distribution of areas is linked to the natural environment of each company. Izaguirre and AGGOR, with Biscayan capital and interests in the plywood board industry of Bilbao, were in charge of the North. Jover & Graells, in a similar situation, were in charge of the port of Barcelona, and the more diverse distribution took place in Valencia. The repeated presence of ALENA reflects its vast productive capacity in the colony, in terms of exploited surface area, resources deployed and dominant position in the Delegation.

32. The navicert system influenced the composition of the freight, even after the Second World War. Introduced in December 1939, these were trade passports that the British consular authorities issued to certify the harmlessness, to the war, of the load transported by a vessel in the context of the maritime block in place against the Axis powers during the Second World War (Santana, 2020). In the case of wood from the former Spanish colony, it meant that the vessels could not ship more than 10-15% of okoume in their load (AGA 81/8152; 81/12304).

It was assembled based on some core ideas: the already detailed certainty that the future of logging in the colony was to be less dependent on okoume to give way to the commercial promotion of other types of timber that could be unrolled; the establishment of production quotas given the lack of capacity of the regular commercial vessel service to ship the wood out of the colony; to avoid intensifying production until the demand in the national market increased and there was an increase in vessels, and to participate, through the Peninsular Delegation, in the sale of wood destined for Spain to stop any individual enterprises, particularly regarding the sale of okoume.

The text in which the General Director presented his ideas, contextualised and gave meaning to the actions taken up until then, contained some interesting comments. Far from identifying the resistances overcome or confessing the concessions made, it anticipated the conflicts that would intensify a short while after. Some are related to the different entrepreneurial interests that co-exist within the Delegation, while others are related to the pressure exerted by the plywood board manufacturers. Regarding the former, the General Director stated that some of the syndicate members expected “higher profits... in the free exercising of their activities”, while, with the implicit objective of reinforcing his own position, he facilitated the active participation of members “that either have no okoume or have it in very low amounts”.³³ To understand both statements, it is important to consider that restrictions on the sale of okoume clashed with the interests of the concessionaires that have better and more abundant reserves of the species and that the distribution of import quotas had a direct impact on the income statement of each logging company. Some felt undermined and argued that the evolution of the production capacity justified reviewing the assigned quota. In fact, the updates were made in 1942 and 1944 (Table 1).³⁴ On both occasions, it was argued that the size of the investments made did not justify the scarcity of the quota and that this did not guarantee the viability of the business. Similarly, the same strategy was reproduced, in other words, to avoid losing the assigned quota and if possible, increase it. However, the 1942 and 1944 reviews established a small yet sufficient reduction in the quota available to the large logging companies of the colony in favour of stabilising the quota of the smallest companies and, above all, of the Vasco Africana-Manyani business group.³⁵

The General Director incorporated a second line of argument of notable interest. His wish would have been to stop the sale of okoume on the Spanish market and to keep all of it for export. If he was unable to succeed in get-

33. AGA 81/8152. The pressures from Vasco Africana should be considered in relation to the need to supply its factory in Spain with raw materials.

34. In 1946, steps were taken to modify the quota but before reaching an agreement, the metropolitan administration established a new model for the sale of wood.

35. AGA 81/12304.

ting the commercial terms and conditions to take this extreme into account, it was due to “the requests of the Directorate of Trade, which was acting on the interests of the – mainly Valencian – plywood board companies”.³⁶

Pressure from the plywood board manufacturers, exerted by those located in Valencia, initially emerged in their objection to the content of the terms and conditions, and was later transferred to the operation of the trade system that the Peninsular Delegation implemented. First, all of the plywood board manufacturers were aware that the colonial administration had designated okoume for foreign export to obtain foreign currency, but they reasoned to the contrary – that they should be provided with okoume and that the foreign currency be obtained by exporting a finished product with higher value, in other words, plywood board. Second, the tensions and conflicts seemed to be frequent during disembarkation of the wood in Valencia.

The documents consulted acknowledge the existence of a controversy, which was never fully resolved, in the relationship between the Delegation and the industrial companies. This resulted in disputes and conflicts that the signing of preferential agreements did not manage to resolve.³⁷ In fact, in addition to the commercial model that the terms and conditions established in 1940, in December of the same year, an agreement was entered into with the Valencian plywood board manufacturers which, in the words of the Delegation, intended to “put an end to all the long-standing differences between producers and manufacturers, thus initiating an era of open understanding and close cooperation between them”.³⁸ The era of understanding was limited to a few months. The Delegation claimed the payment of the shipment of wood from the Valencian plywood board manufacturers, before a notary, after requests from the shipowners, in view of the risk that they would withdraw their merchant ships from the transport of wood, as partially occurred. Time did not bring the logging and industrial companies closer. The Delegation considered the possibility of reducing their shipments to Valencia and the plywood board manufacturers frequently protested, arguing that the wood they received was of poor quality; that the percentage that the trade representative of the Delegation of Valencia received disrupted their business; that there was a need to use more okoume; that there was preferential treatment and, lastly, that they sometimes experienced a supply shortage.³⁹

36. AGA 81/8152.

37. AGA 81/12304; 81/8152.

38. AGA 81/12304.

39. The Peninsular Delegation appointed an important wood storekeeper, Manuel Real Palanca, as the trade representative of the Syndicate of Valencia, to meet the demand for wood there given the complexity of that market. It received 6% of the wood the Delegation sent to that port and, with that, compensated its work while covering the expenses involved in the sale of wood. The Ministry of Industry and Trade reduced that proportion to 4% in 1947 (AGA 81/12304).

If the arguments presented relate to the interests being protected, discovering who supported them is even more revealing. The plywood board manufacturers encountered an environment in the non-colonial metropolitan administration that was receptive to their needs, and the colonial administration progressively matched some of its approaches. In this case, perhaps the most evident is that related to okoume production. In November 1944, the general government of the colony linked the convenience of resuming the awarding of new concessions to the need to increase the insufficient production of okoume.⁴⁰ Although this increase was justified, due to the possibility to compete with that of Gabon, once the international markets opened given the approaching end of the Second World War, some logging companies expressed their concern that more concessions meant more okoume on the metropolitan market, to the detriment of varied wood.⁴¹ The concessional deeds were reopened in 1946 and, in some form, the concerns of the logging companies were confirmed. In March 1949, the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies itself increased the proportion of okoume that could be boarded onto each vessel to the metropole.⁴² It recognised the use that the establishment of the varied wood quota had for the reassessment of the colony's forests – in 1940 it was understood that the exception, and what was obligatory given the circumstances, was to establish an okoume quota – but it deemed it convenient to increase the percentage of okoume per embarkation from 15% to 30% and, consequently, reduce that of varied wood from 85% to 70%. The Peninsular Delegation was tasked with translating these percentages into quotas and asked to update such every now and again to avoid any kind of imbalance between the logging companies.⁴³ However, this instruction arose at a time that corresponded, for several years prior, to a new direction in the intervention of colonial wood.

6. The plywood board manufacturers make their voices heard: the shift towards industry in the sale of colonial wood

Towards the end of 1946, the commercial terms and conditions of 1940 stopped operating as a result of a major event: intervention by the Ministry of Industry and Trade in the distribution of wood from the colony (Order of 18 December 1946). The record of 10 January 1947 stating the content of the order does not enable an assessment of how it was received, although contact

40. AGA 81/12304.

41. AGA 81/12306.

42. AGA 81/12306.

43. AGA 81/12306.

is made with the Ministry of Industry and Trade so that the productive, commercial and processing activity was not interrupted.⁴⁴ The order highlighted the plywood board industry, stating that “use of the wood from our assets in Guinea, in its numerous applications and in particular in the manufacture of plywood boards, is of the highest interest to this Ministry”, because of the sale of such in the domestic markets and its possible positioning in export markets. In turn, it alludes to a crucial element: that the factories be guaranteed a balanced and sufficient distribution of the raw material they need to maintain their production. The intervention was delegated to the National Syndicate of Wood and Cork, although the assignment of this duty was modified in 1948 when it was allocated to the recently created Timber Service.

The documentation consulted is especially obscure in this period. It is difficult to monitor how the Peninsular Delegation adapted to the okoume import and export quotas and to the creation of the Timber Service as a regulator of the sale of wood from the colony. All that can be deduced is a lack of a fluid relationship with the Service, through subsequent comments rather than from data extracted at the time, and certain concern for the increased presence of okoume on the metropolitan market. It was not in vain that in 1948, the Governor-General ordered the maximum amount of this wood that could be shipped.

7. The relative liberalisation at the start of the 1950s

From 1952, once the maximum exponent of economic intervention, José Manuel Suanzes, abandoned the leadership of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, certain changes were observed in the orientation and mechanisms of the intervention of the Guinean timber market. They continued to exist and be exercised by the Timber Service; but, still gravitating towards supply to the plywood board industry, it was capable of stimulating the activity of the forest concessionaires and of substantially increasing the amount of wood exported from the colony.

In July 1952, a joint order by the already independent Ministries of Industry and Trade reworked the intervention in two ways. On the one hand, it obligated the fulfilment of a basic quota of 40,000 Tm for plywood board manufacturers, to be distributed in a balanced manner via six peninsular ports (Valencia 44%, Barcelona 17.5%, Pasajes 11.5%, Bilbao 13.5%, Santander 11.0% and Ferrol 2.5%), and, on the other hand, permission was granted for the forest concessionaires to freely sell the surplus. Monitoring of the supply and, therefore, of the fulfilment of the quota fell to the Timber Service,

44. AGA (81/12304).

granting them broad powers to change the port of destination in each shipment of wood, or for the latter to intervene in the port if needed (BOE No. 192 of 10 July 1952).

In turn, the order established two procedures to calculate the wood. First, the 40,000 Tm that it estimated were needed annually to maintain the plywood board industry was divided into two halves of okoume and varied wood, so that there were no imbalances in the amounts received. Nevertheless, each tonne of okoume had to be calculated as two of varied wood, and as such the real quota became another virtual one of 60,000 Tm, 40,000 of which is varied wood. Second, the order aims to favour the export of plywood boards and, as such, permits any company manufacturing and exporting them to recover the wood used from Guinea as okoume wood and outside of the quota (Order 20/VI/1952), in line with the room for manoeuvre permitted by Decree Law of 14 November 1947, which categorises the exports as an economic activity of preferential national interest.

From 1946, the Peninsular Delegation took on a different role to its previous one, subordinated to the instructions on supply and unloading at the port that the Timber Service gave it. The documentation shows that the intervening agencies did not hesitate to exercise their power when they deemed it appropriate and that the relationship between the Peninsular Delegation and the Timber Service was not marked by understanding. The former considered the latter to be a disrupting element of the normal development of logging companies' activities, and they stated this in March 1953 in the context of a conflict about the orders that the Service gave to divert some vessels to Valencia. The Delegation suggested that the Service was incapable of correctly planning the deliveries to the ports.⁴⁵ And, several months later, its complaints were submitted to the Ministry of Trade, related to:

[...] the constant intervention of the Timber Service, a problem about which the Minister had ample information, which was further complemented by new facts.⁴⁶

The opening up that the Order of 1952 established prospered one year later. In August 1953, the most restrictive measures were lifted (Order of 11 August 1953), establishing free trade, circulation and a price for wood from Guinea unknown since 1940. The change was justified by the fact that, at that time, the production of wood in the colony already exceeded that consumed in the national market and that it was foreseeable that this difference would increase as a consequence of granting new forestry concessions. However, the order established the limits marked by the Order of 1952 as minimum limits

45. AGA 81/12304.

46. AGA 81/12304.

that must be inexcusably covered, expressed in tonnage and in a quota assigned to each port.⁴⁷

It is tempting to link liberalisation with the political influence of the Delegation in the Government. The documentation makes it possible to distinguish it in some way.⁴⁸ In the minutes of 10 August, one day before the approval of the order, a report was provided about the:

[...] free trade dossier and an account is given of the satisfactory results obtained in the interviews held with the Ministers, Undersecretary of the Presidency and of Industry and with the General Director of Morocco and Colonies, that makes it possible to expect their favourable agreement in the aspirations of this Delegation.

In any case, it coincided with the slight opening up of economic and commercial matters promoted by Manuel Arburúa, Minister for Trade, in 1951 (Gómez 1997).⁴⁹

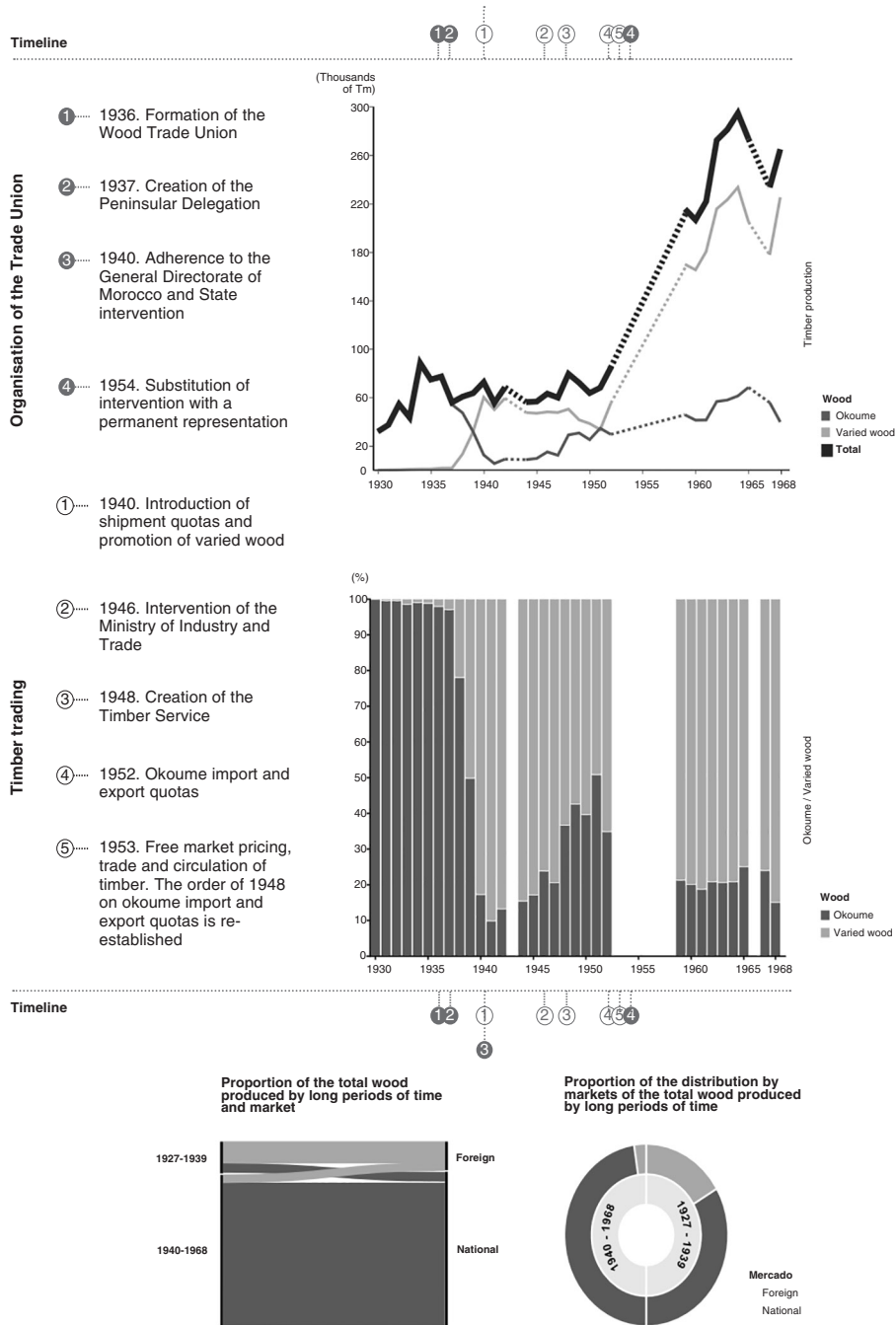
The new framework that the relative liberalisation of the wood trade outlined in these years pushed the Peninsular Delegation to move away from the direct organisation of the timber trade, not without some small resistances motivated by what is understood to be a distortion of the Syndicate's objectives. The latter reported this to the consignee company *Compañía Auxiliar de Comercio y Navegación (AUCONA)*, with which it signed a contract in

47. The order assigned the Peninsular Delegation an auxiliary role: to every quarter provide the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies with precise information about the arrivals of wood, destination ports, the quota reached in each of them if relevant and, lastly, the species comprising the shipments.

48. AGA 81/12304.

49. Nevertheless, a problem still remained: the as yet undeclared okoume, although in this case from a new perspective. In 1948, the general government of the colony, aligned with the defence and promotion of varied wood, maintained the okoume import and export quotas, understood as a maximum limit that can be shipped on each vessel. This was reviewed in 1953 and was conserved until decolonisation. The result was that another new tension was added to the structural tension with the plywood board manufacturers: the dissent within the Delegation itself. A relevant fact not expressed until that point was the commercial weight of the forestry characteristics of each concession. In 1954, SOCOGUI – with the colony's best and richest okoume reserves at its operation in Cabo San Juan – exposed the damage caused by the import and export quota established since 1948 and, seemingly, promoted by some of the colony's large forestry companies, including *Compañía Nacional de Colonización Africana (ALENA)* (AGA 81/12304). This import and export quota stopped them, in what it deemed an abusive interpretation of the order establishing such, from supplying *Marga S.A.* as usual – one of the main Spanish door manufacturing plants at the time, located on a plot of land bordering the port of Santander (AGAPS, 2.0.0 Provisional authorisations; AMS, J-234, nº 12, *Negociado de Ensanche*). SOCOGUI reported the situation, which put the jobs at these facilities at risk, in a brief report delivered to the Head of State in 1953 (AFNFF 6417). However, although interesting, this conflict is beyond the scope of this paper – it delves into the business logic that, going beyond the common objectives shared with the syndicate, is expressed within the Delegation. This is a difficult aspect to resolve since its archive and those of the companies comprising the Spanish Continental Guinea Wood Syndicate disappeared.

FIGURE 2 • Changes in the production of colonial wood (1930-1968)



Source: created based on the statistical summaries of the General Government of the Spanish Territories of the Gulf of Guinea (1942 and 1943); statistical summaries of the General Directorate of Morocco and Colonies (1944, 1945, 1946, 1948 and 1949); Statistical summaries of Spanish Africa (1954); Statistical Yearbook of Spain (1955 to 1968) and FAO (1969).

1952, which enabled it to initially transport 80,000 Tm of wood per year and which was entrusted, to this end, with representing the Delegation and the companies composing it.⁵⁰

The relative liberalisation of the forestry trade enabled the extraction of wood from the colony to regain, in the 1950s, the figures seen before the Spanish civil war. The silvicultural, productive and commercial limitations in which forestry companies operated seemed to justify this fact, together with the characteristics of the business network linked to the production of plywood boards. However, the existence of an excessively rigid regulatory framework, whether in the version promoted by the colonial administration and the Peninsular Delegation or that developed by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Timber Service, cannot be disregarded. Only the changes introduced with the slight opening up of the intervening mechanisms that occurred from the 1950s onwards reinforced the timber supplying function of the colony.

In its internal composition it is possible to observe a constant: the shift in the weight of the different wood received in the peninsula. Before the Spanish civil war, okoume represented the majority and dominant proportion. After that date, varied wood did. In other words, the forestry economy of the colony lost its close relationship with the okoume operation, as had been pursued since 1940. However, it was observed that when the weight of the intervention reflected the interests defined by the plywood board manufacturers – from 1946 to 1951 – the proportion of okoume exported increased considerably.

8. Conclusions

This paper broadens studies of the economic history of Spanish colonialism in the Gulf of Guinea. It focuses on a crucial but scarcely studied period, of which there is a lack of information about relevant aspects such as, for example, the organisation of production and work, taxation, wages, and the development of infrastructures. The Peninsular Delegation of the Wood Syndicate is a key stakeholder to understand, in all its dimensions, the timber supplying function for the Spanish economy that Francoism, especially during the autarkic period, granted to the former Continental Guinea. Established shortly after the start of the Spanish civil war as an organisation similar to others operating in the colony, it soon became an institution with a clear metropolitan profile. The creation of the Peninsular Delegation, in practice, and in the long run the real syndicate, was the milestone that facilitated this change.

50. AGA 81/12304.

Most of the Delegation's work was focused on the organisation of the transport of timber by sea from the coast of Continental Guinea to the Spanish peninsular ports. However, the disembarkation at these ports of the wood arriving from Guinea is the result of an unstable balance between those who extract it in the colony and those who process it in the metropole: between logging companies and plywood board manufacturers. The rigidities of the autarkic framework can be re-read based on the interests served. From this point of view, the Peninsular Delegation of the Wood Syndicate imposed a project that guaranteed the economic viability of most of the forest concessionaires with the more or less constant support of the colonial administration. This project was based on the use of varied wood, given the majority use of okoume, and the needs expressed in this sense by the processing industry. In a context of reduced trade flows and severely restricted material resources, the Peninsular Delegation was an agent that organised the sale of timber and was essential to understanding the export profile of the colony and the extractive nature of the forestry economy that developed there. If the forest concessionaires were direct protagonists of colonial practice, the Delegation contributed decisively to making it possible and maintaining it over time.

Other colonial crops such as coffee and cocoa guaranteed their survival, favoured by remunerative prices and a protected metropolitan market. The Delegation solved the equation in which the colonial crops developed, by directly controlling the sale of okoume and through the resulting productive shift that the plywood board companies were forced to make. The Delegation poured all of its work and political influence into this endeavour. And it was in this undertaking that it built its identity and cemented its special relationship with the colonial administration and its disagreements with some of the metropolitan institutions.

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Author contribution statement

Juan Carlos Guerra Velasco has contributed the following: framework, methodology, investigation, writing, visualization.

Henar Pascual Ruiz-Valdepeñas has contributed the following: investigation, dataset, writing.

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■

Donant suport a la política econòmica colonial durant el primer franquisme: la Delegació Peninsular del Sindicat de la Fusta de la Guinea Continental Espanyola

RESUM

El colonialisme espanyol a l'Àfrica equatorial troba durant el franquisme, especialment en la seva etapa autàrquica, un aliat fonamental en el Sindicat de la Fusta de la Guinea Continental Espanyola i en la seva delegació peninsular. Des del 1936 hi conflueixen de manera obligatòria tots els concessionaris forestals de la colònia. Manquen estudis que mostrin la funció que determinades institucions exerceixen en l'expressió del colonialisme espanyol durant aquest període. Aquest text contribueix a omplir aquest buit a través de l'estudi de l'ocupació que dona sentit al treball sindicat de la Delegació Peninsular: la comercialització de les fustes. S'argumenta que aquesta comercialització és revestida d'una intencionalitat, ja que revela les relacions, sintonies, distàncies o antagonismes que es teixeixen al voltant del fet i de l'economia colonial, alhora que ajuda a entendre el complex entramat normatiu que l'autarquia desplega al voltant de l'aprofitament de les fustes colonials.

PARAULES CLAU: Guinea Equatorial, ocumé, colonialisme, Sindicat de la Fusta

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Apoyando la política económica colonial durante el primer franquismo: la Delegación Peninsular del Sindicato Maderero de la Guinea Continental Española

RESUMEN

El colonialismo español en el África ecuatorial encuentra durante el franquismo, especialmente en su etapa autárquica, un aliado fundamental en el Sindicato Maderero de la Guinea Continental Española y en su Delegación Peninsular. Desde 1936 confluyen en él, de manera obligatoria, todos los concesionarios forestales de la colonia. Faltan estudios que muestren la función que determinadas instituciones desempeñaron en la expresión del colonialismo español durante ese período. El presente texto contribuye a llenar ese vacío a través del estudio de la ocupación que da sentido al trabajo sindicado de la Delegación Peninsular: la comercialización de las maderas. Se argumenta que esta comercialización está revestida de una intencionalidad, pues revela las relaciones, sintonías, distancias o antagonismos que se tejen en torno al hecho y a la economía colonial, a la vez que ayuda a entender el complejo entramado normativo que la autarquía despliega en torno al aprovechamiento de las maderas coloniales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Guinea Ecuatorial, ocume, colonialismo, sindicato maderero

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