

The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies.* Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury, eds. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 264 pp.

Reviewed by Beth Buggenhagen

The *African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies* offers readers a new resource for thinking critically about research and curatorial practices and strategies in relation to photographs as material objects. This timely volume is edited by Christopher Morton, Curator of Photograph and Manuscript Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum and Departmental Lecturer in Visual and Material Anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford; and Darren Newbury, Professor of Photographic History and Director of Postgraduate Studies in the College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton, UK. It is the product of a one-day interdisciplinary workshop at the Pitt Rivers Museum in which scholars and curators came together to discuss photography of and by African women and men, past and present. The idea of analyzing a collection or an archival holding has become popular of late and is in keeping with the emphasis on photographs, not as singular objects but as assemblages in social and institutional contexts. Moreover, Morton and Newbury remind us in their introduction that not only do these contexts shift, but the photographs themselves have their own paths of circulation that open up new possibilities for inquiry and analysis over time.

Anthropologists and other scholars have shown how photography has had a problematic history on the African continent. The camera was used to conquer and divide, to subjugate, and the reify difference. Why then return to this problematic archive? One reason is that photographs are multivalent objects. As such, they lend themselves to new and multiple interpretations. Artists, scholars, and others are reimagining, reawaking, and reclaiming their visual past by mining these archives and providing fresh views of social and political life on the continent.

In the last twenty years, the study of photography in the social sciences and humanities has benefitted from two simultaneous trends, a sustained and growing interest in material and visual culture, with photographs increasingly viewed as forms of material culture, and the emergence of new archives of photographic materials. Focusing on African photographic collections, this edited volume addresses theoretical and methodological issues relating to the study of these materials. The collections discussed largely consist of portraits and images of people. Not considered to the same extent in this book are landscape, architectural, or other photographs created to provide an image of Africa. The volume is based on case studies spanning the African continent from the nineteenth century up to the present. It is divided into four parts: "Connected Histories," "Ethnographies," "Political Framings," and "Archival Propositions." The eleven chapters, which are historical, ethnographic, and practical, explore important themes such as broadening our view to consider the spectrum of official and unofficial archives and collections including family, personal, and state held collections, as well as how scholars can critically and reflexively engage with these materials. As such, the authors expand scholarly notions of what

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counts as an archive and opens up new directions of inquiry. The collaborative nature of the chapter by Ugandan community center organizer Kaddu Wasswa and Dutch artist Andrea Stultiens further opens possibilities for how research is conceived and carried out with important implications for the communities in which archives are held.

Importantly, the authors in this volume also address how communities collect, archive, and protect their visual past and make meaning in the present. The collection, preservation, and interpretation of photographic materials is often a contested and complex process, and this volume should give scholars much to critically reflect on in their own readings of archives.

This book contains numerous high-quality black-and-white illustrations, with many of the photographs printed on a full page. It should be of interest to students and scholars in museum studies, anthropology, visual culture, and history, in addition to curators and archivists. Although the individual contributions focus on Africa, the volume addresses issues of relevance beyond the continent and should appeal to readers globally.

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