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## Helff, Sissy & Stefanie Michels (Eds.). *Global Photographies: Memory, History, Archives*. Transcript Verlag, 2018.

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**Helff, Sissy & Stefanie Michels (Eds.). *Global Photographies: Memory, History, Archives*. Transcript Verlag, 2018.**

The work *Global Photographies: Memory, History, Archives*, by editors Sissy Helff and Stefanie Michels, aims to present and examine the origins of Asian, African, and American photography and contextualize them within a global history of photography. Cultural practices of visual documentation are embedded in local contexts, and the device – the camera – is absorbed differently in, for example, the contexts of the colonial ethnographer and the American family. In her introduction, Michels makes the volume’s key claim clear: that “telling the origins of photography from visual practises within [each region] produces an inclusive narrative in which [the] Asian, African and American origins of photography enter on equal terms” (p. 11). Toward this end, each of the work’s chapters presents an examination of a specific case study of photography and photographs in history, from Africa to America. The kinds of photographs discussed are also varied, such as family photographs and colonial-era ethnographic ‘compositions’. The objects of the photographs are sometimes caught in passing, unaware of their being ‘shot’ and in other cases, pose for the camera. ...

Jürg Schneider’s essay, on photography in Africa, argues that the establishment of linkages between Europe and West-Central Africa was mediated by visual images. Schneider traces the African photographer presence to the 1840s. Among African elites, photographs on the walls of their homes were integral to their self-fashioning. Photographs were also necessary for the evangelical projects in what Schneider terms the Atlantic Visualscape. Jens Jäger’s essay explores the link between history and photography in the nineteenth century, although the debate surrounding *how* photographs construct their objects is still ongoing. Jäger asserts that the way historians look at photographs has changed. Through a close reading of several examples, Jäger underscores the necessity of attending to the contexts of photographs, including the framing texts, as the photograph is read in terms of the “interaction between the photographer and the subject” (p. 51) and its meaning in terms of class, race, and gender relations.

A theoretical essay accompanying Jäger’s is that by Margrit Prussat, who ponders the role of photographs in the contemporary humanities, especially in the digital age, when questions of access, the singularity of images, and the recontextualization of archives are paramount. Artist Sally Waterman’s essay on re-imagining the family album is a meditation on how a “knowingness” imbues her family portrait when viewed years later. It is in studying her own photographs and art works (including video adaptations of her work) that Waterman identifies how family memories are reworked. In a related essay, Jens Ruchatz studies wedding photography and argues that “private photographs...are a locus where individual and collective memories intersect and interact” (p. 188). In texts such as wedding photographs, she argues, “The frames that shape the selection and construction of the photographic records are apt to structure the individual memories of the couple” (p. 198).

There are several essays in the volume on colonial photography. Kokou Azamede studies colonial photographic representations of Togo as pedagogic tools for today. For Azamede, studying colonial photographs within their respective contexts serves a key purpose: “to widen [the] readings [of colonial photography] and to focus on the agency of the African people and their activities” (p. 65). In Hans Peter Hahn’s essay on colonial photography, he calls for an “emotional history of pictures,” with a focus on “the immediate emotions of the beholders..., the emotions that can be read on the faces of those depicted in photographs..., [and] the emotions of the photographer,” wherein “we must ask ourselves if it is possible to asses the photographer’s emotions through interpretation” (p. 99). Richard Kuba’s subject is German photographer and anthropologist Leo Frobenius. Frobenius’ efforts, Kuba notes, were directed at “counter[ing] the effects of time and transience” through

the “visual documentation of African cultural expressions” (p. 113). Frobenius’ photographs are now part of the postcolonial era and are used, Kuba notes, in exhibitions, resulting in debates about the rights to display the cultural materials of tribes, ethnic groups, and communities.

Thabiso Swkgala’s photographic project, “Homeland,” is the subject of Marie-Hélène Gutberlet’s essay. Gutberlet opens with the argument that “the history of South African photography and its stylistic developments are remarkably closely tied to the country’s political history” (p. 72), serving as witnesses, icons, and monuments. Sekgala’s project, Gutberlet notes, recalls the forced relocation of non-white populations to rural areas. The photographs, she concludes, “act as intersections where nostalgia and remembering intermingle with moments of struggle and a longing for the future” (p. 87).

*Global Photographies* is a beginning, the opening chapter for a bigger study of various forms of global visual histories, from the beginnings of photography to the digital archive. However, as such, one would have expected a greater range in terms of the essays selected for a volume titled “global.” Despite this shortcoming, the volume’s otherwise strong contributions may be discussed at various levels, including the history of photography itself across Europe, the African colonies, and America.

This work naturally contributes to the study of visual anthropology, ethnography, and related colonial projects from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The volume also studies specific archives and uses them to ponder larger questions pertaining to visual culture studies, textuality, and narrative, particularly when the essayists debate issues such as framing, meaning, and composition. Additionally, the work contributes to the debates on history, memory, archives, and technology. Last, it poses, through many of the essays, ethical questions regarding the very act of photographing, surveillance, and display. This aspect of the volume, when the essays trace photographic evidence and histories from the colonial times to the digital 21<sup>st</sup> century, must account for the new contexts of political sensitivities in matters of representation, race, gender, and social dynamics. The essays implicitly and in some cases explicitly demonstrate that such an ethical questioning of the visual archive has to do with the anxieties over appropriation of cultural materials and cultural memories (which, as Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz have proposed, are increasingly fought over as “ethnic property”). It is interesting, finally, to see that similar concerns and questions can be raised around photographic archives as different as American family albums and colonial anthropological ones. *Global Photographies* should be of interest to a diverse group of people, including scholars in visual culture studies, colonial studies, cultural studies, and literary studies.

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