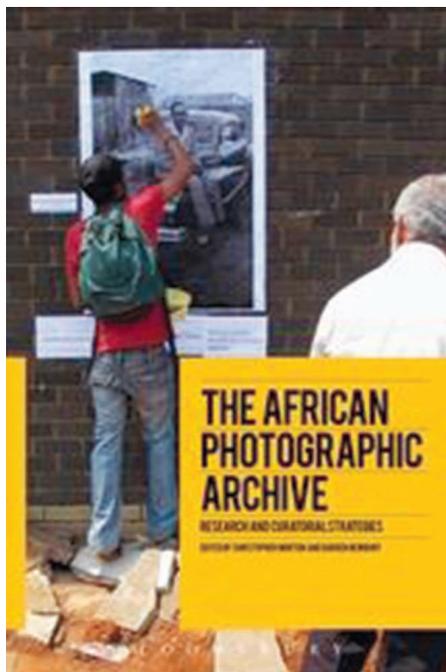


across community and regional boundaries—this text is a useful resource, in that it carefully presents the strong case that objects of significance within associations that are similar to those found in Ejagham territory could possibly travel across regions, not just by means of physical commerce, but by the purchasing of intangible, aesthetic concepts as well.

I walk away from *Purchasing Culture* with a greater appreciation for the nuanced connections between women's and men's associations in Cross River. In my own research of the Ibibio women's institution known as Mbopo, I found many seemingly inexplicable aesthetic ties between Mbopo and the men's associations of Ekpo, Ekpe, and Ekong—the sharing of objects, emblems, performative gestures, and apparel—but found myself unable to grasp the rationale for and method behind a number of these connections. Rösenthaler's analysis has shed a new light for me to consider Mbopo, its material cultures, and how they gain movement via networks of exchange, in this respect. This book offers an encyclopedic collection of histories about the dominant associations in Ejagham culture, and tracks these histories into their contemporary positions, all in an effort to demonstrate the interconnectedness of commerce and exchange with sustainable and evolving cultural systems. Rösenthaler's work is a gift to Cross River scholarship and an invaluable contribution to the fields of African studies, women's/gender studies, art history, and anthropology.

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book review



The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies

edited by Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury
London: Bloomsbury, 2015. 245 pages, 72 b/w ill., bibliography, index. \$112, cloth.

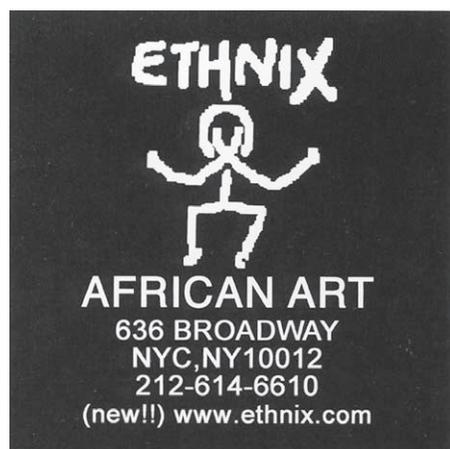
reviewed by Jessica Williams

Standing on a pile of rubble with his back to the viewer, Xolani Ngilima is fixed on the cover of this recently published collection of essays in the act of pasting an enlarged photograph, originally taken by his great-grandfather, Ronald Ngilima, onto a brick wall in Actonville (Benoni, Gauteng), South Africa. Taken by one of this compilation's twelve remarkable contributors, Sophie Feyder's documentation of the 2011 informal street exhibition "Searching for the Old Location" visually introduces the reader to several of the questions the authors of this volume engage. How does the publication of African photographers' previously private collections aid in or complicate the production of local histories? How do curators and scholars navigate the tensions that exist between the complex historical pasts photographs depict and their visual and material affects? What roles do oral histories play in the formation and interpretation of photographic archives that are located both on and off the continent and, extending from this, how do digitization efforts and new online platforms challenge our under-

standing of African photography as a categorical construct?

Edited by Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury, *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies* comprises an introduction and eleven significant case studies by authors who deftly explore the methodological challenges confronted by those researching the continent's photographic histories and sincerely interrogate the abounding practical, theoretical, and ethical matters of the archive. The well-illustrated book is separated into four parts along thematic, rather than chronological or geographical lines. While the first section, "Connected Histories," returns to the institutionalized collections of expeditions and colonial-era missions (Morton, Rippe), the book's second section, "Ethnographies," comprises studies that consider the potentially more precarious archives held and displayed in individual homes (Zeitlyn, Behrend, Vokes). "Political Framings," the book's third section, offers four case studies stemming from the South African context. Containing some of the compilation's most self-reflective essays, the authors in this section honestly explore the challenges of relocating previously neglected photographic collections in the present (Feyder, Newbury, Hayes) and complicate our understanding of once-oppressive images as they are artistically repurposed (Peffer). Further opening up discussions of the reinvention and relocation of photographic archives is the book's fourth and final section, "Archival Propositions." Featuring a photo essay (Stultiens) and a forceful contribution by Erin Haney and Jennifer Bajorek, this concluding portion of the book rigorously interrogates the roles Western institutions have played thus far in enclaving photographic collections while simultaneously forefronting the generative potentials of artistic and cross-regional archival collaborations.

In his contribution to the first part of the book, Christopher Morton offers detailed object biographies of two sets of Richard Buchta's (1845–1894) mounted albumen prints made during the Austrian photographer's early travels through Equatoria. Looking to the reproductions of Buchta's images in nineteenth century European literature, Morton addresses how Buchta's photographs shaped the visual representation of Central Africa throughout the nineteenth century and argues that they continue to do so today as dematerialized images online. Heike Behrend also looks to the ways in which images have been translated across mediums in her consideration of the shifting role photographs have played in funerary rites in central Kenya. In her discussion of how photographs from family archives have been edited and repurposed for printed funeral programs, Behrend links the resulting photographic biographies to the "pro-



gressive structure” of generation-sets and the growth of the genre of biography in the region (pp. 81–33). In his contribution to the book’s third section, John Peffer similarly engages the home-as-archive and considers the ways in which images have been creatively modified for other uses. Looking to the repurposing of passbook photos into enlarged, airbrushed, and hand-painted wedding portraits, Peffer intriguingly shows how images originally produced for an oppressive archive have been reclaimed by their subjects and actively shifted into a new image repertoire.

In their consideration of photography’s technology, a number of the book’s authors address the medium’s simultaneous production of both subjects and objects, offering insightful reflections on the images that were created by various photographic processes as well as the conditions and networks within which photographs act.¹ In “The Missionary, the Diviner, and the Chief: Distributed Personhood and the Photographic Archive of the Mariannahill Mission,” Christoph Rippe deftly draws on Gell’s concept in his discussion of three photographs that were created by Br. Aegidius Müller while working for the Catholic Mission in colonial Natal. A wonderful writer, Rippe intertwines the stories of Abbot Franz Pfanner, Ugitschigitschi, and Chief Lokothwayo in his discussion of the role their likenesses played in both producing eminence and compounding power. Considering a collection of photographs commissioned and held by Mr. Grace Bwire, a senior political official in southwestern Uganda, Richard Vokes also examines photography’s and the archive’s role in establishing modalities of power. Probing the “officialness” of any given archive, Vokes first relates how Uganda’s early colonial administration and, later, Idi Amin’s regime shaped local archival practices, before extending his discussion to the etiquette his visitors adhere to when physically engaging with photographs they come across in loose piles and shoeboxes that have been carefully placed throughout the chairman’s sitting room. Mindful of the complex issues accompanying the consideration of photographs as physical objects with shifting material agencies, Rippe and Vokes offer examples of how one might follow both the semantic and material logics of photographs as

three-dimensional things.² Building from this, David Zeitlyn writes beautifully about the lost materiality of some of the images he was unable to recover from the local studio of Cameroonian photographer Toussele Jacques, linking the recovery of images in forgotten archives to a potentially redemptive process.³

In their contribution to the book’s final section, Haney and Bajorek summarize current institutional trends as they relate to African photographic collections and energetically call for innovative archival practices ranging from new digital and conservation initiatives to recent repatriation projects. A perfect end to this collection, their essay not only critiques current archival and collecting practices but offers ways forward through inspiring examples of initiatives stemming from the continent. “Where it is a question of opening up access to photographic collections, the ability to frame and realize projects outside conventional institutional structures has been pushing archival projects into new spaces—physical, social and discursive,” the authors write (p. 216). Elsewhere, Sophie Feyder candidly discusses the successes and tensions that arose while putting together such a project. Addressing issues ranging from copyright to how a private collection becomes a public archive, Feyder adeptly probes the “historical frictions” caused by the mobilization of the once-private Ngilima archive into the public sphere (pp. 153–54). The need to seriously consider the implications that exhibition initiatives have on the construction of local histories is also taken up by Darren Newbury in his honest discussion of his experiences organizing exhibitions of Bryan Hestline’s photographs for South African and British audiences. Questioning the separation of genres, Patricia Hayes also addresses the creation of local narratives in her discussion of the portraits John Liebenberg made in the 1980s of migrant workers living in Namibia’s *okombone* compound and their display, during the Windhoek Month of Photography, on digital screens in the Wernhil Shopping Mall. These authors’ self-reflective discussions of their projects all point to the type of insightful questioning researchers, curators, and the like should undertake in their consideration of

their own research, especially when negotiating the complex ways in which the continents’ collections are open to and engage with the present (p. 161).

Broadening our understanding of the archive, the contributors offer a range of unique perspectives, rigorous readings, and theoretically compelling engagements with African photographic collections both on and off the continent. Despite the prevalence of the archive in contemporary exhibitions, conferences, and discussions, this new publication offers remarkably fresh insights and a breadth of methodological approaches that both researchers and curators will undoubtedly find useful.⁴

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Notes

1 Here, I refer to Bruno Latour’s repeated proclamation that subjects and objects equally construct and influence one another. While Latour makes this particular statement within his discussion of the “deepened intimacy” that exists between humans and nonhumans in modern collectives, I find it intriguing to extend this prospect to a consideration of the materiality of photographs and the images that take form in their emulsions. Bruno Latour, “A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans,” in *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 196.

2 On the semantic and material logics of things see Michael Yonan, “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies,” *West 86th* 18, no. 2 (2011): 244.

3 Zeitlyn writes: “Washing negatives free of years of dust is sometimes a strange experience. From underneath the red dust a hint of a face is visible. But the fixing was poor and as the dust washed off the emulsion goes too. The water turns red then black: another image gone forever” (p. 64).

4 See, for example, Okwui Enwezor’s 2008 exhibition “Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art,” held at the International Center for Photography in New York, and earlier College Art Association panels dedicated entirely to the subject, such as *Following the Archival Turn: Photography, the Museum and the Archive* (held in Chicago in 2001) and its resulting publications in the journal *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* (2002).