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Re-framing Photography – Some Thoughts

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Conventional historiography on photography stresses its evolution as a story of technological progress. Histories of photography, even "world histories of photography", have long lacked a global perspective. A global narrative of photography would thus have to not only include these neglected regions but would also alter the conventional narratives. Research in this area is currently booming and what is being uncovered are stories of connection beyond western exceptionalism. Central in this research is the discovery and use of photographic archives outside of Europe (Morton/Newbury 2015; Lydon 2005; Pinney/Peterson 2003). Photography never belonged solely to the West nor was the idea of creating a likeness of a thing or person an exclusively western or modern notion. As a technology photography was easily integrated into visual practices that had preceded it in all world regions. In nineteenth century Cameroon grassfields, for example, the idea of the portrait of an important person – male or female – was realized in three dimensional portraits (Brain 1971). In time photography was added to funerary practices and co-existed for several decades until solely assuming this social function. In East Asia photography entered a visual culture in which "dissonant seeing" (Fukuoka 2011) was practiced long before photography came about. In Meiji Japan, older Tokugawa visual practices and photography were easily integrated (cf. ibid.). In 1925 a camera was developed in China that could create photographs in the pictorial tradition of panorama paintings and thus integrated bi-ocular visual practices with photography (cf. ibid.; Gu 2015: 165 f.).

Only a couple of months after the announcement of the technical process of daguerreotyping in Paris in 1839, the ottoman-egyptian Pasha Mehmet Ali

decided to portray the ancient port of Alexandria with this technique, thus making a strong claim as to the role Egypt was to play in the geopolitical situation of the time. France and Britain were getting more and more involved in military campaigns against opponents to their vision of world order in which markets were open to their products and industries in other countries than their own should remain unprotected (Haney 2010). By the 1850s there were professional photographers and photographic studios operational on all continents – including black American, Chinese, Japanese, West African or Armenian photographers, to name but a few to illustrate their diverse backgrounds (cf. Sheehan/Zervigón 2015). The customers of these photographers were just as diverse and this draws attention to the fact that the histories of photographies within world regions and of the colonial gaze are intertwined. In West Africa for example, African or black photographers, served the wishes of African customers as well as European ones and vice versa (also Geary 2004; Tatsitsa 2015). At no point was photography only the privilege of Europeans. This point is empirically and forcefully argued by Jürg Schneider in this volume. Schneider's point on African professional photographers working for heterogeneous customers – West African families and individuals as well as European colonial officials – is enforced by Hans Hahn and his contribution on the photographic work of the African photographer Acolatse in Togo. Acolatse knew how to produce pictures suitable for the colonial needs of the German colonial commanders and used his skill for the promotion of his business as a professional photographer. In China and Japan similar processes have been described (cf. Gu 2015).[1] It took only five years until the production of tourist photographs from Japan had been taken over by Japanese photographers (Hight 2002). The histories of these photographers also remind us how productive and concrete Latour's ideas of connections are in producing a global history that is more than diffuse flows.

What historians are unearthing in the archives are stories that need to be added to the history of photography. While the way this history was told was not wrong, it was incomplete, to borrow from Chimamanda Adichies famed speech of 2009.[2] By being incomplete it constructed a hegemonic story of

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[1] The Chinese Photographer Afong Lei is even mentioned in Naomi Rosenblum (2008: 73).

[2] Retrievable here: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story (last download, 09.06.2017).

the West and reduced all other world regions to objects of western gazes. Not to say that there was no colonial gaze, yes, there was, but it was not the only way photography was used, it was never uncontested and it was never stable. To start telling the origins of photography from visual practices within the regions produces an inclusive narrative in which Asian, African and American origins of photography enter on equal terms (cf. Sheehan/Zervigón 2015).

Photographic archives in the West are not monolithic themselves. With Bourdieu we should be very aware of this and not artificially essentialize Europeans, and their photographic practices and archives (Bourdieu 1990). Complicating the story and the archive within Europe is a fundamental in countering the tendency of conventional histories of photography to over discuss the relation between photography and art and thus center on discourses on the leading social classes in Europe. In overcoming this paradigm and focusing on the broader social functions of photography in Europe new archives are considered. Bourdieu himself worked with private archives and interviews with rural French people in the 1960s. Through the use of their archives he added their story to the story of photography.

The archiving process takes center stage in research on a global history of photography.

How many photographs are deleted every day in today's age of digital photography? Most of us are ourselves photographers using our mobile phone as a camera that is constantly with us. We may take many photographs of a certain scene, say a birthday party of our children, and instantly discard all those pictures that we do not want to be preserved. This selection process is done by us intuitively and is possibly quite difficult to theorize – both aesthetic and social criteria probably taking center stage here. What we do, however, is to create our own personal image archive. Such private archives are often passed on within the family with the selection criteria being inaccessible for the descendants.

Questions about the materiality of photography become pertinent in institutional archival practices, where the physical reality of the photographs is a visible fact and necessity for the professional archivist. The ways in which to deal with visual archives, especially those containing a colonial legacy, unsettles all considerations about the construction, positionality and ambivalence of historic photographs. Archival practices ask for a pragmatic organ-

ization which fundamentally counters mere aesthetic approaches to photography. Moral questions follow if photographs are released online without comments, inviting everyone to put them into new contexts. Richard Kuba and Margrit Prussat in their contributions address these issues.

The archiving process and the decisions taken in it thus fundamentally determine Memory – and this is not only the case with personal memory but also with archival memory. As David Zeitlyn has recently argued Archives represent the liminal phase between memory and forgetting (Zeitlyn 2012). In the personal memory there might be very good reasons to forget painful memories or just bad hair days. Such photographs speak of a reality that we wish to forget. Jens Ruchatz in his chapter on wedding photography and the changing criteria for it underlines this point. In our everyday experience photographs are evidence to the real, although semiotically they only index reality. Jens Jäger in this volume gives a genealogy of the "reality effect" of photography and the complex relationship of the academic discipline of History and Photography in the German case.[3]

When my four-year-old daughter asked me when the world stopped being black and white, this difference seemed too academic for the way she made sense of the world. Photographs make claims on being faithful to reality – which is why photography is a strong tool in the hand of politicians – be they colonial or anticolonial. In South Africa Black and White Photographers documented the anti-apartheid struggle. Some of their pictures, like the one of Hector Pieterson in the students' rising of Soweto in 1976 became iconic in the international campaign against Apartheid and remain so in present South Africa. In this volume, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet recalls the important work of South African photographer Thabiso Sekgala in this respect.

History – a construct – seems again naturalized through photographic "evidence", since it is impossible to disconnect the signifier and the signified. The viewer takes in both at the same time. However, authors of photographs are the photographer, the subject, the viewer and the corpus (archive) in which it is found.

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3 Cf. more general on the way Photography was constructed as being 'authentic' and 'objective' in the 19th century also Sheehan/Zervigón (2015) and Burke (2003).

When confronted with these photographs the descendants are often puzzled in trying to unravel the relationship of the photograph to the real: a burdensome and controversial task. Marianne Hirsch has in an exercise shown us how painful and in the end impossible it was to fix the real in a photograph of herself (Hirsch 1997; cf. also Barthes 2000). Sally Waterman in this volume undertakes such an endeavour with regard to her family album. If it was impossible for Roland Barthes to "find" his deceased mother in her photographs, how do people engage with photographs of their ancestors when photographed in colonial moments?[4] Michael Aird has developed the concept of "Looking Past" for the way indigenous Australians relate to such photographs. In "Looking Past" the humiliating aspects of the photographs – for example neck chains – they instead resurrect the historical and social person depicted (Aird 2003; also Lydon 2005). Similar practices can be found in West Africa – the iconic picture of Amadou Bamba of Senegal and its mass produced revisionings being the most prominent example (Haney 2010: 139–142). Alf Lüdtke has developed the term *Augensinn* (meaning of the eyes) with regard to photographic practices of workers in the German Democratic Republic. Lüdtke questions whether it is ever possible to limit the meaning of a photograph to a controlling subject and rather calls for a disparate reception, where each individual act of looking at a photograph creates a zone of new possibilities that might or might not be independent or in opposition to the intended reading by the producers of the image (Lüdtke 2004).

Recent research about the production and reception of photography around the globe questions the stability and dominance of the colonial gaze. Edward Said's seminal work on visual representations of the Orient in paintings ushered in a wave of research on the "imperial eyes" (Pratt 2008) of the Europeans of the late eighteenth century and the "colonizing camera" (Hartmann/Hayes/Silvester 1999; cf. also Bate 2003; Young 1990) of the late nineteenth century. Due to its indexical and iconic nature, the message of a photograph is never fixed. Therefore, even photographs that were used by pro-colonial associations like the German colonial society have the potential of a variety of readings. The colonial codes might be sidelined by African audiences – as Kokou Azamede shows in this volume. Azamede's project is to re-appropriate the photographs in the archive from the German colonial

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4 Cf. a very convincing argument for the use of "colonial moment" instead of a totalizing "colonial situation" Kuster (2016).

society as documents for the history of Togo. Reconstructing the colonial gaze inherent in the pictures clashes with the interests of African audiences. When we presented photographs from the German colonial society under the heading "colonial photography" at the Goethe-Institute in Lomé in 2016 a heated dispute arose from a visitor – probably a prominent person from Southern Togo – who fiercely resisted Togo be called "colonial" or a "colony" at any time. His reaction was a strong indicator of the dichotomous and hierarchical space proposed by the colonial paradigm and the ambivalence and heterogeneity of it being acted out in a non-linear process.

The images that were shown in Imperial Germany made the colonial project appear much stronger and successful than it really was (cf. Comaroff/Comaroff 1992; Cooper 2005; Ballantyne/Burton 2012). To assess the difference between reality and its representation in the European archives, one has to understand the archives and multiply them (cf. Stoler 2001). On the basis of these findings History is made by Historians (cf. de Certeau 1991). The term history – as a past reality thus has to differentiated from History as the narrative produced (on the problem of reality cf. ibid.: 52 f.; Landwehr 2016).[5] The quest for completeness of (past) reality has been proved an impossibility. Historiography is therefore a specific genre of memory production (cf. Erll 2005). In the paradigm of a global history of photography the positionality of conventional historiography becomes visible. As new actor-networks (Latour) are being added, the size of the other networks and their places is re-calibrated.[6] This volume thus seeks to re-frame photography as a social function of heterogeneous actors in many parts of the world in the past and present.

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5   Who defines the real as: "an infinite mass of unidentified objects" (Landwehr 2016: 95).
6   cf. the productive relationship of Latour and global history: Epple 2012; Glasmann/Gerstenberger 2016.

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