PHOTOGRAPHY AS A SOURCE FOR SOCIAL HISTORY

Photo source: Going to the market, 1937, Museum of Archeology and anthropology, University of Cambridge, n. 107514 MF

Link to the program:
https:// https://womatwork.hypotheses.org/workshop-photography-as-a-source-for-social-history
Zoom link:
https://cnrs.zoom.us/j/99179114651?pwd=VmNURmNxQXp2UzVtbHBmLzQyTkM5dz09

31 May 2024
9:30 – 17:00

LOCATION
Room 0.018 (ground floor),

Bâtiment de recherche sud,
Campus Condorcet,
Aubervilliers

Workshop organized as part of the project

WOMEN AT WORK. For a Comparative History of Women's Professions in Africa

IMAF
Institut des mondes africains

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WOMEN AT WORK

Funded by the European Union

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Friday, 31st May 2024

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kM5dz09

9:30 – 10:00   **Elena Vezzadini**, IMAF - **Domenico Cristofaro**, University of Bologna

Introduction: Uncovering the History of Women from Photo Archives: the Examples of the Colonial Archives of Ghana and Sudan

Session 1: Photography in colonial situations
Discussant: Anne Hugon, University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne

10:00 – 11:00   **Marleen Reichgelt,** Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands
Zooming In: Children as Guides and Informants in Merauke, West Papua (Colonial Netherlands New Guinea), 1905-1910

Coffee break

11:15 – 12:15   **Valentin Nkouda,** Université de Maroua – University of Cologne
Photography and Agency: the German-Cameroonian Colonial History through the Visual Sources

12:15 – 14:00

Lunch break (IMAF, Bâtiment de recherches sud, 3rd floor, room n. 3.023)

Session 2 : Using photography in social and historical research
Discussant: Karin Pallaver, University of Bologna

14:00 – 15:00   **Constance Perrin-Joly**, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord–IRIS-IFSRA
Capturing by Photography the Social Relations at Work : Example from Researches in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso

15:00 – 16:00   **Justin Carville,** Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dublin
Racializing Photography: Reflecting on the Constellations of Photography, History and Race

Coffee break

16:15 – 17:15   **Jürg Schneider**, University of Basel
Writing History/ies in the Age of Photography

Abstracts (in alphabetical order)

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Racializing Photography: Reflecting on the Constellations of Photography, History and Race

Abstract This paper asks how photographs might contribute to exploring Patrick Wolfe's statement that 'races are traces of histories'. Taking as its cases study the mobilization of photography to classify the Irish as both non-white and white across a 50 year period from the late nineteenth through to the mid-twentieth century, the paper will focus on the methods and theoretical frameworks that open up spaces to reflect on the intersections of photography, social history and race. The paper proposes that instead of exploring photography and race solely through questions of representation and othering, a more productive approach is to examine photographs as the material traces of the entwined histories of technologies of representation, racial ideologies, objectification, subjectivity and governmentality which collectively contribute to mobilization of photography in processes of racialization. Through this approach the paper avoids reading photographs as passive reflections of history, and instead identifies those moments when entwined histories form particular historical constellations of racial formations and political subjectivities. The paper suggests that this requires a particular type of historical work that seeks to identify how and why the constellations of photography, race, and social history became more illuminated at those moments when political subjectivities are contested, and diminished when questions of racial categorizations seem less politically and culturally salient.

References

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Photography and Agency: the German-Cameroonian Colonial History Through the Visual Sources

Abstract The history of colonialism and photography is closely linked to the industrial and imperialist expansion of Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. The establishment of colonial rule over the African continent and the spread of photography as a means of documenting and transmitting images of distant regions began at the end of the nineteenth century. Colonial photography belongs to an incalculable number of images produced on the African continent during the era of the European presence, and which somehow found their way to Europe. Like its European neighbours, France, England and Belgium, the German colonial empire and its protagonists have left an indelible mark on the history of the photographic collections of German institutions. This intervention focuses on the vast archive of colonial photographs, those showing Cameroon, a colony under German rule between 1884 and 1919. By focusing on the photographs taken during the expeditions, I will show that they constitute sources and visual traces of German colonial history in Cameroon. Initially, I will look at imperial biographies, the direct links between agents and photographic collections for the benefit of the colonial empire, and the receptions they received. I will then address the question of the mutation of colonial objects, in this case photography, and its local agency. My analyses will be based not only on the theoretical postulates of the "biographical turn," but also on the work of the British historian of photography Elizabeth Edwards, who studies the intersections between photography and history. To this end, we are no longer simply interested in the conception of photographs as historical sources, which has long dominated the historical sciences, but rather in what "photographs do to history."

References

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Edwards El., *Raw Histories. Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001)
Hight E.M., Sampson G.D. (eds.), *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (London: Routledge, 2004)
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Rippe C., „Schizophrene Provenienz: „Koloniale" Fotografie als Bild, Objekt und Praxis," in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 72 (2021), pp. 526 – 539
Wiener M., *Ikonographie des Wilden: Menschen-Bilder in Ethnographie und Photographie zwischen 1850 und 1918* (München, 1990)

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Capturing by Photography the Social Relations at Work : Example from Researches in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso

Abstract My approach places the analysis of the interaction between researchers and interviewees at the centre of socio-visual practices, based on a study conducted in companies in Ethiopia and, more recently, Burkina Faso. I propose to analyse the interplay involved in taking photographs as a way of shedding light on the relation with work, as a complement to the traditional tools of ethnographic investigation I will focus on the ways in which race, gender and class relations impact on this interaction. The presentation will first present the different everyday uses of photography in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia in order to explain the difficulties of setting up a visual survey in a company in Burkina Faso. In addition, the organisational framework can exploit or neutralise the social relations involved in photographic interaction. The presentation then highlights how Ethiopian men tend to play to the camera. While being a female photographer may make it easier to photograph Ethiopian women workers, the presentation highlights the difficulty of not reproducing power relations by rendering invisible the work of those who often adopt a discreet stance in front of the camera. We also show how these relationships should be considered in the context of the biographical experience of the actors, with the photographic interaction replaying previous situations of domination, including in other photographic interactions experienced differently from one interviewee to another.

References

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Graham A., « Pictures and Politics: Using Co-Creative Portraits to Explore the Social Dynamics of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo », Visual Methodologies 4 (1), 2016, 11-29

Perrin-Joly C., Josse-Durand C., « Photography, a Sensitive (Re)Source for Social Sciences : The Production and Circulation of Visual Representations in African Social Worlds », Sources. Materials & Fieldwork in African Studies, 6, 2023, 21-35

Perrin-Joly C., « Ce qu'on montre du travail : saisir par la photographie les rapports sociaux dans les entreprises éthiopiennes ». Sources. Materials & Fieldwork in African Studies, 6, 2023, 299-337

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Zooming In: Children as Guides and Informants in Merauke, West Papua (Colonial Netherlands New Guinea), 1905-1910

Abstract At the heart of this presentation is the presence of Papuan children in photographs taken by Dutch Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Netherlands New Guinea (present-day West Papua, Indonesia) in the early twentieth century. Departing from the simple but critical realisation that 'children were there too' afforded by the act of digitally zooming in on high-definition scans of photographs, this article attempts to methodologically 'zoom in' on traces of children acting intermediaries in other sources in the colonial archive as well. Inspired by Ariella Azoulay, I use the active presence of children as historical subjects participating in processes of colonisation in the photographs to offset the dominant missionary discourse which presented children as passive objects of adult governing – thus obscuring how the mission depended on the knowledge, skills, and networks of these children. Engaging the paradox of absence and presence of colonised children in both visual and textual sources in the colonial archive, three different intermediary roles adopted by children involved with the Catholic mission are analysed: guiding and escorting the missionaries when travelling, assisting the missionaries in daily chores, and instructing the missionaries in the local language and customs.

References

Bressey C., 'Surfacing Black and Brown Bodies in the Digital Archive: Domestic Workers in Late Nineteenth-Century Australia', Journal of Historical Geography 70, 2020, 1–11

Reichgelt M., 'School Subjects: Photography as Source on Children's Lives in the History of Colonial Boarding Schools', History of Education, 2024, 1–23

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Writing History/ies in the Age of Photography

Abstract

This presentation is a reflexion and exchange around the questions what it means to work as a historian with and through photographs and in particular in what ways photographs change or impact on our relationship with the past.

References

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