

**THE AFRICAN
PHOTOGRAPHIC
ARCHIVE**

Research and curatorial strategies

Edited by

**Christopher Morton
and Darren Newbury**

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CONTENTS

List of figures vii

Preface xi

List of contributors xii

- 1** Introduction: Relocating the African photographic archive 1
Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury

PART ONE CONNECTED HISTORIES 17

- 2** Richard Buchta and the visual representation of Equatoria in the later nineteenth century 19
Christopher Morton, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
- 3** The missionary, the diviner and the chief: Distributed personhood and the photographic archive of the Mariannahill Mission 39
Christoph Rippe, University of Leiden, the Netherlands

PART TWO ETHNOGRAPHIES 59

- 4** Redeeming some Cameroonian photographs: Reflections on photographs and representations 61
David Zeitlyn, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
- 5** 'Celebrating Life': The construction of photographic biographies in funeral rites among Kenyan Christians 77
Heike Behrend, University of Cologne, Germany

- 6 The chairman's photographs: The politics of an archive in South-western Uganda 95
Richard Vokes, University of Adelaide, Australia

PART THREE POLITICAL FRAMINGS 113

- 7 Vernacular recollections and popular photography in South Africa 115
John Pepper, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, United States
- 8 Searching for the 'source community': The Ronald Ngilima photographic archive and the politics of local history in post-apartheid South Africa 135
Sophie Feyder, University of Leiden, the Netherlands
- 9 Going and coming back: Curating the post-apartheid archive 157
Darren Newbury, University of Brighton, United Kingdom
- 10 Okombone: Compound portraits and photographic archives in Namibia 177
Patricia Hayes, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

PART FOUR ARCHIVAL PROPOSITIONS 197

- 11 Versions of fragmented history and (auto)biography: On and from the Kaddu Wasswa Archive 199
Andrea Stultiens, Independent Artist, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- 12 Vital signs: Twenty-first century institutions for photography in Africa 215
Erin Haney, George Washington University, Washington DC, United States and Jennifer Bajorek, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Bibliography 231

Index 243

LIST OF FIGURES

- 2.1 Portrait of an Aka girl against a backdrop with measurements marked to right 23
- 2.2 Folio 10 from *Die Oberen Nil-länder* showing a group of 'reclining prostitutes' (*Ruhende Dirnen*), and a Ghawazi dancer (*Tanzende Gawazieh*) 25
- 2.3 Posed group of Zande warriors, South Sudan, 1879 28
- 2.4 'Zandeh Warriors'. Drawn by Friedrich Rheinfelder, from a photograph by R. Buchta 30
- 2.5 'Sudanese dancers at An 'Azûmeh (from a photograph)' 31
- 2.6 'Bari-warrior and wife. From nature by Richard Buchta' 32
- 2.7 Composite image showing 'Bari-Mädchen' (Folio 39a) and 'Tomm-Spieler' (Folio 41b) from *Die Oberen Nil-länder* 33
- 3.1 Back and front of a devotional card of Abbot Franz Pfanner, including 'a relic from his garment' 44
- 3.2 Caption here reproduced: 'Kafir Diviner - These Scheming, and Often Very Intelligent Magicians and Diviners Have an Extremely Paralysing Effect on Mission Work' 46
- 3.3 Original caption: 'Kafir Diviner in Full Official Attire - Legs, Arms and Breast Painted White' 47
- 3.4 Caption on print: '391. Kafferchief Lokotwayo & Indunas', c.1895 51
- 3.5 Caption here reproduced: 'A Kafir Chief - The Small Horns on His Necklace Contain Secret, Superstitious Medicines, but Mostly Plant Toxins' 52
- 3.6 Framed photograph of Chief Lokothwayo, home of Inkhosi E. B. Shozi, 2007 53
- 4.1 Hombon Madeleine (born 1936, died 1999) and Abel Selon (born 1936, died 2001) 64
- 4.2 Chief Mogo Michel 67
- 4.3 Chief Mogo Michel 68
- 4.4 A man and a woman doing *gol mbe* in Warwar village in 1953 70

- 4.5 Men and women drinking from same gourd also in Warwar, 13 April 1993 71
- 4.6 David Zeitlyn and Nafa 'Kung' Jeremie doing *gol mbe* in Somié, 16 May 1986 72
- 5.1 Front cover of the funeral program of Eston Ngure Kinga'ru (1934–2011) 86
- 5.2 Photographic biography of Eston Ngure Kinga'ru (1934–2011) 87
- 5.3 Front cover of the funeral program of Nancy Wangari Eston Ngure (1934–2012) 89
- 5.4 Photographic biography of Nancy Wangari Eston Ngure (1934–2012) 90
- 6.1 The chairman's political assistants prepare for a rally during his 2001 election campaign 97
- 6.2 Former Minister of Internal Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, the late Eriya Kategaya, arriving to open the inaugural Rwampara Day celebrations in late 2000 99
- 6.3 Former Minister of Ethics and Integrity Miria Matembe presides over a 'women's rally' in 2002 100
- 6.4 Former Vice-President Specioza Kazibwe during a visit to Bugamba in 2007 100
- 6.5 A visual affidavit of a bride price transaction 107
- 6.6 The sub-county's agricultural officers respond to a local outbreak of Coffee Wilt Disease (CWD) 109
- 6.7 Chaka-mchaka course, 1996 111
- 7.1 Lounge snap of the Gorrey family, Sophiatown, 1942 (recto) 118
- 7.2 Lounge snap of the Gorrey family, Sophiatown, 1942 (verso) 119
- 7.3 Gladys and Maria walking to Kapitan's, anonymous street photograph, Johannesburg, 1967 120
- 7.4 M. Mathebula by KwaMadiba Nkosi, Mofolo, 1970 121
- 7.5 White wedding portrait of Charles and Paulina Matiwane, Sophiatown, 1950s 125
- 7.6 White wedding portrait by Alpheus Gwangwa studio, Alexandra township, 1971 126
- 7.7 Portrait of three brothers. Digital image by unknown studio, Mpumalanga, c.1990s 129
- 8.1 Map of Benoni's Location and Indian Bazaar 139
- 8.2 Part of a Hindu wedding ceremony taking place in the courtyard of groom's family 140
- 8.3 Portrait of Myriam Ali, born in 1933 in the Old Location from a Gujarati father and a Zulu mother 141
- 8.4 The main square in the Old Location, nicknamed *Esquareni* 143

- 8.5 Ivy, one of the participants, in dialogue with a shopkeeper on Mayet Drive about the Ngilima portraits 145
- 8.6 Xolani Ngilima (great grandson of Ronald Ngilima) gluing a poster while Billy Magoo (left) and his friend look on 146
- 8.7 Photograph of the six Indian men that created such an excitement on Mayet Drive 147
- 9.1 Unidentified man laughing, Windermere, Cape Town, c.1949–52 158
- 9.2 *African Dilemma: A Survey of Urban Conditions*, exhibition display, Stuttafords department store, Cape Town, January 1952 162
- 9.3 *Colour Conflict in Africa*. Flyer for exhibition of 'A People Apart', Borough Hall, Halesowen, October 1955 166
- 9.4 Unidentified mother and child, Windermere, Cape Town, c.1949–52 167
- 9.5 Still from *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, 2012 168
- 9.6 Unidentified man, Cape Town, c.1949–52 172
- 9.7 Martin Machapa, 2006 173
- 10.1 Wernhil Shopping Mall, October 2011 178
- 10.2 Portrait of resident in Okombone labour compound, Windhoek, 1984 186
- 10.3 'Jesus of Ombalantu' (photographer's caption) 187
- 10.4 Portrait of resident in Okombone labour compound, Windhoek, 1984 189
- 10.5 Portrait of resident in Okombone labour compound, Windhoek, 1984 190
- 10.6 The SWAPO president's portrait emerges from the plane during the arrival of Andimba ya Toivo, David Merero, Hage Geingob and others from Angola, 11 September 1989 193
- 10.7 Portrait of NANSO activist Agab Hendricks, Windhoek, 26 July 1988 193
- 11.1 Detail of a photograph that is part of a sequence in which I open a box with material that Kaddu sent to me after our first meeting in 2008 203
- 11.2 Detail of Kaddu Wasswa's living room in Mayirikiti with original painting and a reproduction in a metal plate. 2013 204
- 11.3 Detail of one of the collage pages Kaddu Wasswa made in the 1990s to show the people around him what he had been doing to support his ideas at the time to found a community centre 205
- 11.4 Scanned and retouched negative from Kaddu Wasswa's collection 206
- 11.5 Scanned and retouched negative from Kaddu Wasswa's collection 207
- 11.6 Detail of a photocopied reproduction of a collage page 208
- 11.7 Photocopied detail of a photograph taken at Kaddu Wasswa's request to prove his prediction made upon the return of the body of the Kabaka Muteesa II of Buganda for a state burial in 1971 209

- 11.8 Detail of a photograph, part of the box sequence mentioned in Figure 11.1 210
- 11.9 Detail of the scanned and retouched 4×5 inch negative 211
- 12.1 J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, untitled (silver gelatin print), Lagos, Nigeria 221
- 12.2 Maryam Jafri. Images 1–4 from *Tunisia-Tanzania-Malaysia-Senegal 1955–1960* 222
- 12.3 Maryam Jafri. *Independence Day 1934–1975 (2009–present)* 222
- 12.4 Mrs Zubeida Habib Rahimtoola shaking hands with an unidentified woman 223
- 12.5 Mr Mian Rafiuddin holding an award 224

PREFACE

This volume has its origins in a one-day workshop, *Interpreting African Photographic Archives: Research and Curatorial Strategies*, convened by the editors at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, on 7 December 2011. We would like to acknowledge the support of Birmingham City University and the African Studies Centre, University of Oxford, which enabled us to host so many excellent speakers at that event. It brought together academics, curators, artists and a group of research students in a number of disciplines, to consider both established and emerging themes in the research and curation of photographic archives relating to Africa. Workshop papers by Sophie Feyder, Erin Haney (with Jennifer Bajorek as co-author), Christopher Morton, Darren Newbury, John Pepper, Christoph Rippe, Andrea Stultiens and David Zeitlyn have been revised for publication here and joined by essays from Heike Behrend, Patricia Hayes and Richard Vokes, all of whom have worked extensively on African photographic collections. The workshop was closed by a stimulating afterword by Elizabeth Edwards who reflected on the key themes that emerged from the day's discussion.

The workshop itself was convened to complement the exhibition *People Apart: Cape Town Survey 1952. Photographs by Bryan Heseltine*, which was curated by Newbury at the Pitt Rivers Museum and ran from 19 July 2011, until 8 January 2012. It seemed to us that the exhibition of this fascinating collection – that had recently come to light as a result of the research process – raised a series of critical questions about the role of the researcher in driving debates about, and setting the research and curatorial agenda for, African photographic collections. The workshop sought to widen such reflexive issues outwards to then consider expanded notions of the African photographic archive, from institutional collections to private and personal assemblages, as well as the ways in which researchers and artists are curating local reengagements with photographic archives as part of their work. We would like to thank all of the participants for their enthusiasm for this project and for their forbearance in bringing its results to publication.

Finally, we wish to express our thanks to all those institutions and individuals who have kindly granted permission to reproduce a selection of the photographs that have proved such rewarding objects of enquiry.

11 VERSIONS OF FRAGMENTED HISTORY AND (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY: ON AND FROM THE KADDU WASSWA ARCHIVE

Andrea Stultiens

*Most people do not write their own history
Some people are given a history that is not really theirs
But who can oppose and prove otherwise.*

Kaddu Wasswa John

Photography might be thought of as a medium that shows what is gone. Texts that try to get to the nature of the medium argue that photographs are objects that refer to death, to what is no longer tangible and accessible (Barthes 1981: 96). It has been convincingly argued that photographs are tools, used to register and fix identities, and to accumulate knowledge and, therefore, power over others (Tagg 1988). In the combination of photo-essay and text that comprise this contribution, I want to present an alternative perspective based on work I did as a photographer and (nascent) researcher.¹ It is based on the documentation of a single life. Although the life and its documentation were far from exemplary, it was this pile of papers – an assemblage of texts and images – that drew my attention and that I photographed. Led by the documentation and the accompanying stories we heard, Ugandan photographer Arthur Kisitu and I also photographed in Uganda from 2008 until 2010. In collaboration with Kaddu Wasswa and Arthur Kisitu, I then edited the resulting collection of images into a book, which can serve as an example of a way to deal with a photographic archive and narrative in a context that includes both vernacular and outside views (Stultiens, Wasswa and Kisitu 2010).

I met Kaddu Wasswa (born Uganda 1933) in 2008. I had been in his country twice as a tourist, visiting a friend I used to live with in a student house in the Netherlands. During these trips I had not been able to take anything for granted. The simplest things had to be thought about while, at the same time, much seemed familiar; and had been seen before on television. I had to watch my step and had a constant feeling of information overload, but there they were, the colourful markets, the ladies carrying baskets on their heads. After the second trip I developed a project as an artist. I tried to use photography not as a tool to fix or control (my view of) others but as a way to go beyond the culture shock that I experienced during my first two stays. I began by asking two groups of school children to photograph what was important to them to show to the children in another village.²

My first visit to Kaddu's house took place a week after we met in Uganda's capital city, Kampala. Arthur Kisitu told me I should see some of the photographs his grandfather has since I was interested in Ugandan archives. He had just mentioned this when Kaddu Wasswa called him to meet up since he was in town. He turned out to be a charismatic man and an appointment to come to Kyriowa, a village close to Uganda's second biggest town, Jinja, followed instantly. The visit started with a tour of the house and grounds. Then Kaddu Wasswa announced that he was going to fetch his collection. When, on a mat in his garden, he opened a piece of cloth to reveal his collection, I immediately understood that this was what I had been looking for: an opportunity to interact with a view from the inside. Not the missionary or colonial images with which I was familiar from illustrated books on Uganda published in the first half of the twentieth century (Hattersley 1907; Lloyd 1921; see also Tumusiime 2009) but a rotary club photograph from the 1970s where Ugandans are donating to white nuns (Stultiens et al. 2010: 96). Not the horror stories about Idi Amin but a document on the thinnest possible paper rejecting the manuscript of a novel written by Kaddu Wasswa due to a lack of paper and printing ink (Stultiens et al. 2010: 84).³ This collection would allow me to go beyond what I had read and seen so far, which was limited to tourist guides, books mostly about postcolonial politics and some ethnographic sources that at the time seemed to me to be endless lists of observations that failed to shed light on what I saw and experienced.

I instantly knew I wanted to try to make a biography about this man. But by first suggesting and then doing this I stepped into his life and became part of the story I wanted to tell. I did not want to claim an authorship that was not mine. Kaddu Wasswa had been making sure that these images existed, that they were contextualized over time, that the photographic (and other) documents have a materiality that tells its own story in relation to the transparent message of what was photographed (Edwards and Hart 2004: 1–15). So I had to make a biography *with* this man. A hybrid between biography and autobiography. His and also partly mine. At the same time I did not want to deny that my interests (and

Europeanness) presented Kaddu in a different way than he would have himself. In an attempt to distinguish as clearly as possible the different voices involved, I did not alter any of the documents Kaddu Wasswa gave me but instead photographed them while I held them.⁴ My white hands frame his material. I hope that this visual strategy makes the reader of the book aware of his or her skin colour and relation towards what is seen. The medium is present; it makes itself visible and is part of the story (Mulder 2004: 60–5). In compiling the book I had to choose from all the photographs made. This felt like an impossible task; choices were made by me based on my interest in photographic representation and with a still very limited knowledge of Ugandan history and culture.

Kaddu Wasswa used photographs to prove what he did, to transfer the moment into an object he could show and share. When I visited him for the first time in his village he gave me his curriculum vitae. On it was a long list of occupations and activities he employed, accompanied by a photocopied photograph with a few sentences to explain it. The explanation began as follows: 'Records are good. What I am indicating here could not be believed if "ink and photography" were not the evidence.' Kaddu Wasswa had no intention to create an archive – a word that only appeared when I entered his story. He did, however, intend to create the possibility to share what he preserved. This, as Jacques Derrida argues, is key to the constitution of an archive. There are objects – they do not have to be photographs – that are references to something else: something that existed outside of the here and now of the archive (Derrida 2010: 3).

Kaddu Wasswa explained why he started documenting his life with an anecdote:

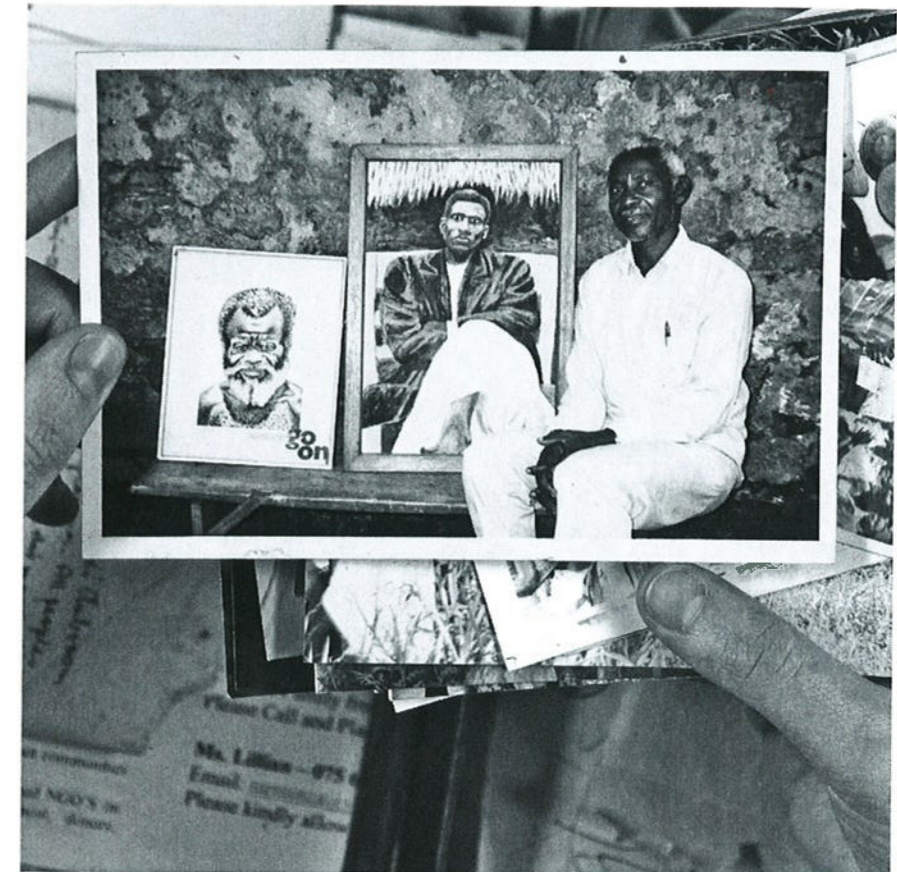
My father died when I was five years old. My mother was left with nothing. The family vandalized all his property, but she managed to keep one photograph, a small photograph. She gave it to me at the age of twelve and informed me what had happened that caused me to grow up as an orphan. From that moment I realized that preserving things is essential. And that things as they grow older, they become more valuable. (Cited in Blokland and Pelupessy 2012: 215–16)

Here a photograph not only foreshadows death but also creates a way forward. Kaddu Wasswa does not own this specific photograph anymore; though he had a painting made of it, which has a prominent place in his living room (see photo-essay). A residue from the past made the situation Kaddu Wasswa found himself in as a 12-year-old understandable and caused a lifetime commitment to documenting initiatives taken and the events that resulted from them.

Even though Kaddu is proud of the book we made, he also began to notice its shortcomings in relation to his reality. Audiences in the Netherlands felt that I

should have approached the man's story more as though he was a fictional novel character, whereas Ugandans said they did not see enough of the man, Kaddu Wasswa.⁵ Some viewers commented that they only saw a man who failed at most of what he attempted to do. Kaddu Wasswa then asked whether I could make a revised version of the book, to put more emphasis on his ongoing advocacy for non-commercial community centres and his attempts to educate his community about the dangers of alcohol abuse in relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Limited by all sorts of practical challenges, I suggested that he would select the material himself and that I then would produce a print-on-demand volume, based entirely on his edit. The Kaddu Wasswa Archive 2013 is made up solely of photographed documents, including reproduced photographs.⁶ In this version there is a lot of text, partly in Luganda, partly in English, and there are many documents that are relevant and understandable only within the Ugandan context.

The photographs in the 2010 version of the Kaddu Wasswa Archive refer to and show a past in order to understand the representation of it in (relation to) the present. The image that shows a situation that happened at a specific time and place becomes a time machine that refers to other places and moments to which it is causally related. These places and moments are of course not the same for those seeing the image. Every documented fragment leads to other fragments that are part of a library of experiences, interests and observations connected to the individual that encounters it. The engagement with the image will be completely different when that individual is Kaddu Wasswa himself who keeps digging up new documents and photographs every time I meet him, or me with my interest in what I can and cannot understand of a culture that is not mine through photographs, or others seeing and reading what I attempted to do.





top confidence and learn many things - you learn to cope with situations. In this picture the Youth saw just a picture in a magazine which made them "mad" to ACT the scene. They are so happy, life is quite full. That was in 1960's... now all those in pictures are prominent leaders in many spheres of life. All persons who were in the YGC agree that the Club developed the personalities they enjoy now. P.P.S.

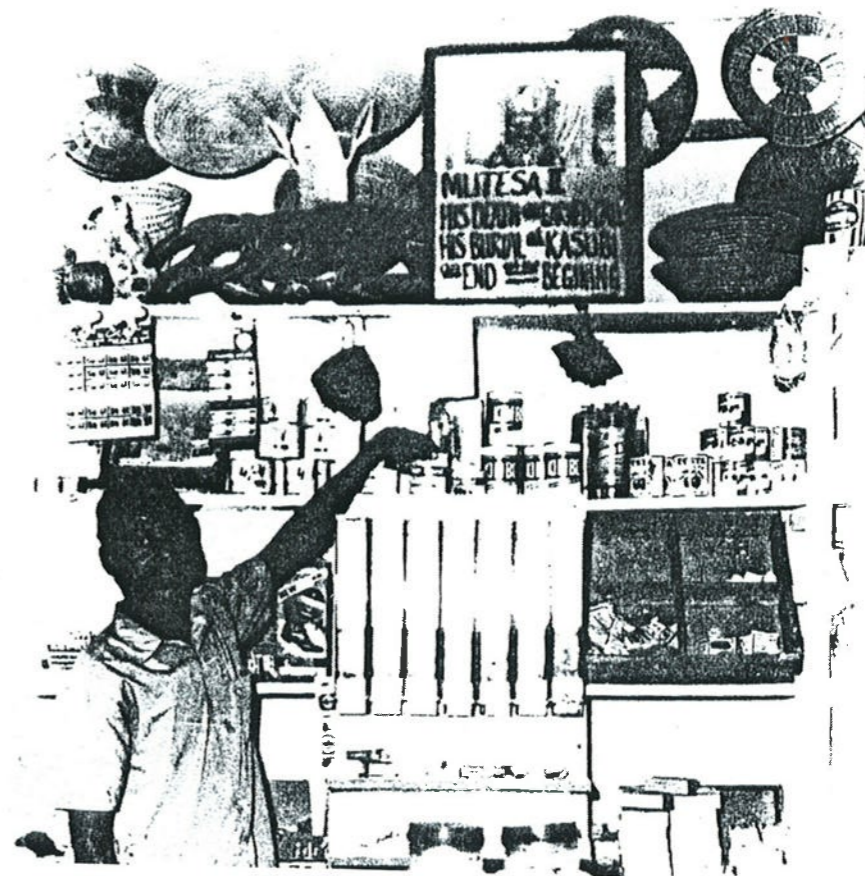
Top
 At our CLUB-HOUSE we enjoyed ourselves - prepared snacks and quik-eatees which we shared and devoured like cubs!! We had our marked days when we held PICNICS, WALKS, and Ballroom dancing. Then we had Dramas practices days and so on and so forth. We debated, we visited, saw films, got speakers

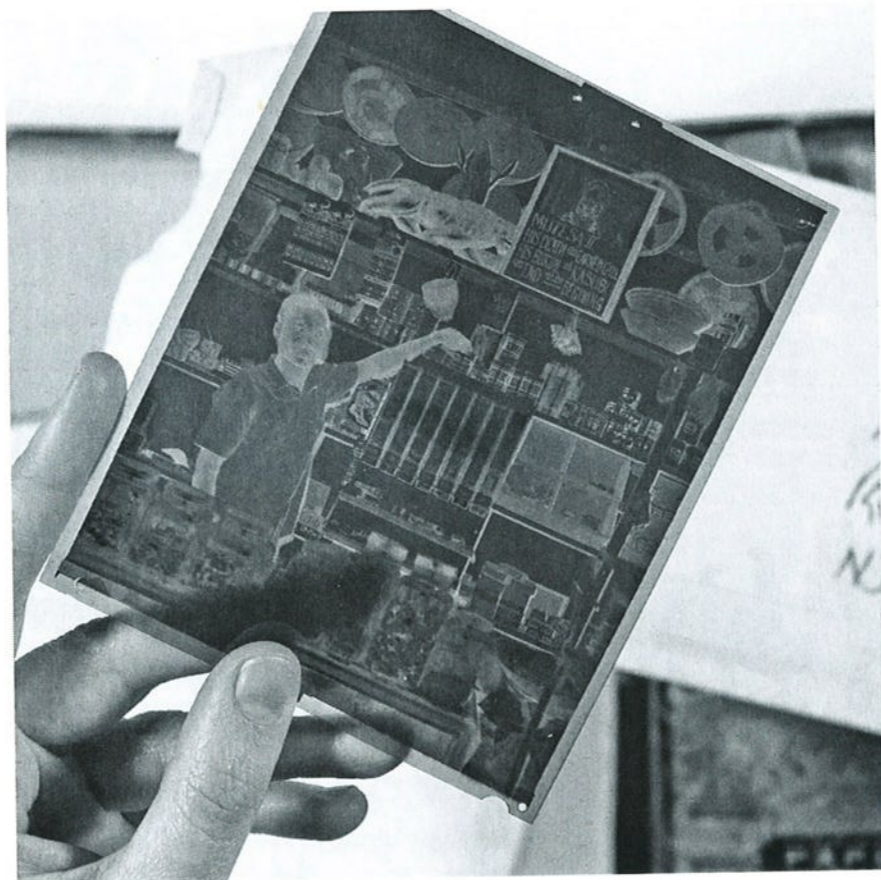


Carol never breaks a date now

JOIN THE YGC







PAGE 203. FIGURE 11.1 Detail of a photograph that is part of a sequence in which I open a box with material that Kaddu sent to me after our first meeting in 2008. The photograph I am holding shows him with his ancestors. The painting in the centre was made at his request, based on the photograph his mother gave him when he was 12. 2009.

PAGE 204. FIGURE 11.2 Detail of Kaddu Wasswa's living room in Mayirikiti with original painting and a reproduction in a metal plate. 2013.

PAGE 205. FIGURE 11.3 Detail of one of the collage pages Kaddu Wasswa made in the 1990s to show the people around him what he had been doing to support his ideas at the time to found a community centre.

PAGE 206. FIGURE 11.4 Scanned and retouched negative from Kaddu Wasswa's collection. Mock Jazz Band, part of Kaddu Wasswa's Youth Group's Club, c.1960.

PAGE 207. FIGURE 11.5 Scanned and retouched negative from Kaddu Wasswa's collection. Outing to the beach, part of the activities of Kaddu Wasswa's Youth Group's Club, c.1960.

PAGE 208. FIGURE 11.6 Detail of a photocopied reproduction of a collage page. The reproduction is part of a volume that Kaddu Wasswa called his Biographical Record Book. When people started stealing his original photographs and documents he decided not to show them anymore but instead to make photocopies to still be able to prove and tell his past.

PAGE 209. FIGURE 11.7 Photocopied detail of a photograph taken at Kaddu Wasswa's request to prove his prediction made upon the return of the body of the Kabaka Muteesa II of Buganda for a state burial in 1971. The photograph, I was told, held great importance but only showed rough black-and-white shapes due to the poor photocopy reproduction, making it impossible to read the original status of the photograph, printed from a large format negative. This underlined the importance of the documented moment. At that time in Jinja, where Kaddu Wasswa was living, there was only one (Asian) photographer who could do this.

PAGE 210. FIGURE 11.8 Detail of a photograph, part of the box sequence mentioned in Figure 11.1.

PAGE 211. FIGURE 11.9 Detail of the scanned and retouched 4x5 inch negative.

Notes

- 1 The project, both book and accompanying theoretical reflection, was my thesis for the Master of Photographic Studies degree at Leiden University.
- 2 In the first exhibitions, which took place in The Netherlands (Nederlands Fotomuseum 2010) and Uganda (Makerere University Art Gallery and Afriart Gallery 2011), I provided volumes with all the material for the audience to browse through. Presentation of the work has developed since, and each subsequent exhibition has included more recent images and moments out of the life of Kaddu Wasswa and the relationship between us: Museum of Contemporary Art in Nyanza, Rwanda (2012), Art Cade, Marseille (2012) and Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (2013).
- 3 Amin took over after toppling Milton Obote in 1971 and was in power until 1979. He expelled the large Ugandan Asian population and his regime led to an endless list of

disappearances and political murders in the country. The feature film *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), with Forest Whitaker as Idi Amin, is an example of how the figure of Amin has come to dominate popular international representations of Uganda's recent history.

- 4 See Bas Vroegé's explanation with the exhibition 'Multivocal Histories', curated by him as part of the Noorderlicht Photo Festival 2011 in Groningen (Netherlands), <<http://www.paradox.nl/multivocalhistories>> (accessed 24 February 2013).
- 5 Comments were made by several individuals in response to the Kaddu Wasswa Archive exhibition in the Netherlands, as well as in a review by Merel Bem in the national newspaper *The Volkskrant*.
- 6 The book is available on Blurb (<<http://www.blurb.com/b/4554234-the-kaddu-wasswa-archive-2013>>). Kaddu has seen and commented on the book. He sees points for improvement, not least because the documents had been compiled in a rush. We plan to make another version in 2015.

Christopher Morton is Curator of Photograph and Manuscript Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, UK and Lecturer in Visual and Material Anthropology at the University of Oxford, UK. He has published extensively on collections histories and the history of photography within anthropology, particularly relating to Africa.

Darren Newbury is Professor of Photographic History and Director of Postgraduate Studies in the College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton, UK. He has published widely on photography, most notably on the history of photography during the apartheid period in South Africa and the use of historical photographs in post-apartheid museums and exhibitions.

'This exciting collection treats photographic images and archives as messages offered to an unknown future. Traces of past events become revelatory in the hands of these stellar contributors. This is a book that should be read by everyone interested in the potential of new practices of visual history.'
Christopher Pinney, Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London, UK

'This is a timely and ground-breaking collection of essays that focusses on the construction of the African photographic archive as a contested, critical site of collection, reflection and re-invention. In eleven distinctive and finely-honed studies, the archive is stretched and extended – both geographically and theoretically – so that it ranges from the vernacular to the official, the ephemeral to the artistic, while opening up to question the very terms that it puts into place.'
Tamar Garb, Durning Lawrence Professor in the History of Art at University College London, UK

African photography has emerged as a significant focus of research and scholarship over the last twenty years, the result of a growing interest in postcolonial societies and cultures and a turn towards visual evidence across the humanities and social sciences. At the same time, many rich and fascinating photographic collections have come to light.

This volume explores the complex theoretical and practical issues involved in the study of African photographic archives, based on case studies drawn from across the continent dating from the 19th century to the present day. Chapters consider what constitutes an archive, from the familiar mission and state archives to more local, vernacular and personal accumulations of photographs; the importance of a critical and reflexive engagement with photographic collections; and the question of where and what is 'Africa', as constructed in the photographic archive.

Essential reading for all researchers working with photographic archives, this book consolidates current thinking on the topic and sets the agenda for future research in this field.

PHOTOGRAPHY

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