

Call for Papers

Photographs Beyond Ruins: Women and Photography in Africa

A one-day symposium at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London

Friday 14 July 2017

This symposium marks the opening of 'Usakos – Photographs Beyond Ruins: The Old Location albums, 1920s-1960s', an exhibition at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London. The exhibition centres on three private collections of historic photographs preserved and curated by four women residents of the former 'Old Location' in Usakos, an urban railway hub in central Namibia. With a view to reflect the resonances of these personal archives, Paul Grendon's contemporary photographs enter a visual dialogue with the women's collections, thereby providing a particular opening into the present and future.

Demolished under the apartheid plan for Namibia in the 1950s, the Old Location is remembered with nostalgia by its former residents, who were forcibly removed to a new township on the outskirts of Usakos. In the course of their research into Usakos's history, Lorena Rizzo and Giorgio Miescher were introduced to the photograph collections of Cecilie //Geises, Wilhelmine Katjimune, Gisela Pieters and Olga //Garoës. These women had for many years been collecting, curating and circulating photographs taken in the Old Location, thus preserving and reshaping memories of this time and place.

These photographs, and the collections of which they are part, shed new light on southern African histories. Viewed from an urban history perspective, they differ strongly from hitherto dominant narratives of location life, focusing as they do on sociality and social relations, and the dignity and self-respect with which subjects presented themselves to the camera. In Usakos today, these images have become a particular historical form through which women negotiate their past, its bearing on their present and what it holds for imagining their future. Unlike the collections of African photographers' studios, it is the people in the photographs to whom names can be attributed, and the photographers – some of whom were itinerant – who remain largely anonymous.

This conference takes the lead offered by this new research to focus on African women and photography. On the one hand, papers are invited that cover aspects of photographic practices defined in the broadest sense: African women as clients, as photographers, as photographic subjects and as collectors and curators of photographs and private photographic archives; women engaged in aesthetic practices that bridge conventional distinctions such as that between the visual and the oral; and women's role in memory work – whether through purely photographic collections, or other private collections that include photographs, letters, identity documents, moving image, objects and other manifestations of material culture. We are particularly interested in the themes of historic collections and memory work, but will also consider papers looking at women's engagement with photographic practice today.

On the other hand, the conference will reflect on how far female photographic practices constituted a domain in which women represented, commented on, responded to and made sense of their experiences of the transformations brought about by colonialism and apartheid. We invite papers which reflect on how women's photographic and other archival and

memory-work practices help to illuminate the specific histories of life under segregation, apartheid and colonialism more broadly – whether (for example) of urban planning, forced removals, housing, the railway system, migrant and domestic labour, cosmopolitanism, education and cultural life.

We expect that the majority of papers will focus on the African continent, but we also welcome proposals dealing with similar issues in the diasporic context.

The conference will be of relevance to academics and researchers in these fields as well as practitioners and a more general audience with an interest in Namibia and/or in African history and photography. Contributors are asked to bear this in mind when drafting their presentations.

The one-day conference will take place on Friday 14th July 2017 in the Senate Room, Senate House, University of London. More details and registration arrangements will be available shortly after the close of the call for papers. Unfortunately the symposium organisers are unable to assist with travel and accommodation costs.

Please send abstracts (300 words max.) and your name, title, affiliation (where appropriate) and contact details to:

Dr Giorgio Miescher, University of Basel, giorgio.miescher@unibas.ch
and Dr Marion Wallace, marion.wallace@wallpear.plus.com
by 17 March 2017.

Sponsored by:

Centre for African Studies, University of Basel
Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London

With support from:

Centre of African Studies at SOAS, University of London
College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton
Hutchins Center, Harvard University



For the Brunei Gallery exhibition see <https://www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/forthcoming/>.

For more information on the Usakos photographs see <http://www.chrflagship.uwc.ac.za/photographs-beyond-ruins/> and:

Paul Grendon, Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo and Tina Smith, *Usakos: Photographs beyond Ruins. The Old Location Albums, 1920s–1960s* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2015)