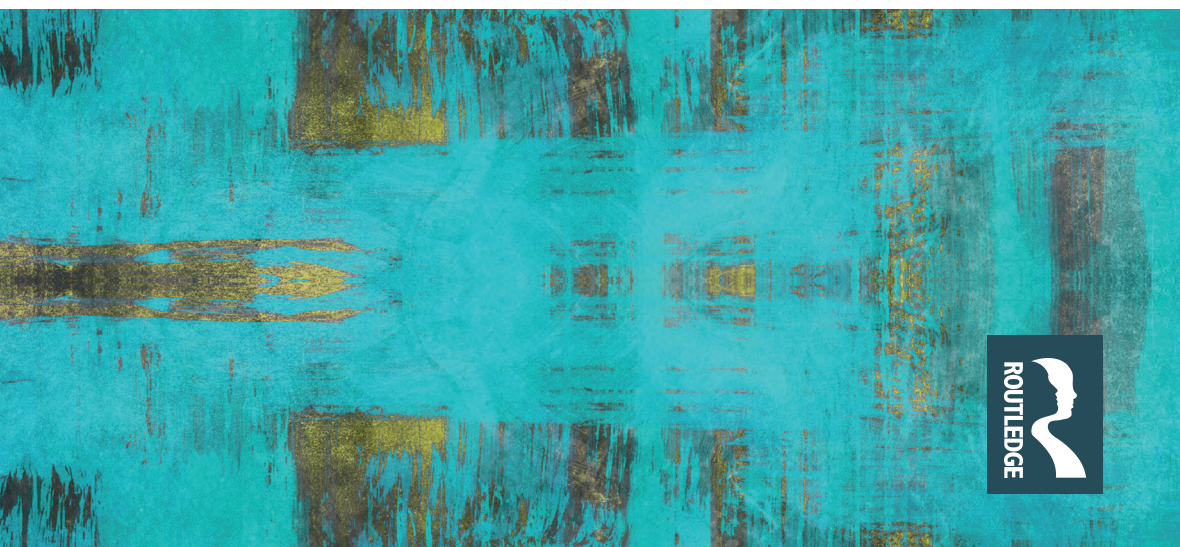
Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Africa

PHOTOGRAPHY AND HISTORY IN COLONIAL SOUTHERN AFRICA

SHADES OF EMPIRE

Lorena Rizzo



ROUTLEDGE

Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa

This book studies the relationship between photography and history in colonial Southern Africa, using a series of encounters with Southern African photographic archives to reflect on photography as a distinct historical form.

Through the use of private and public archives, images produced by African itinerant photographers, white settlers, and colonial state institutions, this book explores the relationship between photography and history in colonial Southern Africa. Late nineteenth century Cape Colonial prison albums, police photographs from German South West Africa, African studio portraits, identity documents, travel permits and passports from the 1920s and 1930s, visual studies of whiteness and blackness authored by settler photographers, South African *dompas* photographs from the 1950s and 1960s, and aerial photography from the Eastern Cape in the mid-twentieth century are examined to highlight the ways in which photographic images cut across conventional institutional boundaries and complicate rigid distinctions between the private and the public, the political and the aesthetic, the colonial and the vernacular, or the subject and the object. *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* argues that rather than understanding photographs as a means of preserving and recreating the past in the present, we can value them for how they evoke at once the need for and the limits of historical reconstruction.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of colonial history, photographic history, visual media, and African studies.

Lorena Rizzo is a historian at the University of Basel, Switzerland. She has taught in universities in Switzerland, Germany, Namibia, South Africa and the USA, curated photographic exhibitions, and organised public history projects across Europe and Southern Africa.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-34301-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-43945-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Lumina Datamatics Limited

Contents

Acknowledgements

There are a number of institutions and people without whom this book would not have been possible. I began working on this project as a fellow in the Department of Africanamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan in 2010. I would like to thank Derek Peterson for hosting me, and David William Cohen for the many conversations, early morning neighbourhood breakfasts, and walks around Ann Arbor. Helmut Puff and Kathryn Babayan were lovely friends and colleagues with whom to share the joys and sorrows of diasporic lives. Claire Zimmerman, Christopher Ratté, and their two children, Helena and Leo, hosted me and made me feel welcome and at home. Between 2011 and 2013 I was a research fellow in the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Bellville, South Africa. These were the formative years for this project, since I could do extensive archival research, interviews, and oral history. Premesh Lalu and Suren Pillay were generous hosts at the CHR, and every conversation with them was exciting, instructive, and critical for refining my understanding of South African history and critical theory. Ciraj Rassool and Lelie Witz at the History Department of UWC have been colleagues and friends for many years. I value their ongoing interest in my work, their intellectual generosity, and their exceptional knowledge of South African pasts and presents. Ciraj, Leslie and Gary Minkley, at the University of Fort Hare, Alice, Eastern Cape, South Africa, have been critical in transforming South African history, and they have been an inspiration for those of us who wish to push the boundaries of the discipline and write imaginative histories that speak to audiences within and beyond the academy in meaningful ways. While at UWC, I was privileged to meet a group of exceptional co-fellows and members of faculty, among them Phindezwa Mnyaka, Nina Sylvanus, Ruchi Chaturvedi, Jane Taylor, Noeleen Murray, Brian Raftopoulos, Maurits van Bever Donker, Janeke Thumbran, Bianca van Laun, and Anna Selmeczi, all of whom made the CHR a place of scholarly rigour, and social and personal well-being. Lameez Lalkhen was a remarkable and friendly administrator, who made the lives of international visitors as comfortable as possible. The summer schools organised by Premesh Lalu, Gary Minkley and Helena Pohlandt-McCormick were great opportunities

for intense discussion and for strengthening our ties across disciplinary fields and geographical regions. I continue to value the colleagues I met on these occasions and the friendships forged. Archival research in Cape Town was critical for some of the key arguments developed in the book. Erika Le Roux and staff at the Western Cape Archives and Records Service were incredibly helpful and supportive in accessing the photographic collections and granting permission to reproduce and publish photographs. Collections at the South African National Archives and the Ditsong Museum of Cultural History in Pretoria, the Museum Africa in Johannesburg, and the National Geospatial Information in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform in Cape Town were all easily accessible, and the archivists most helpful in securing high-quality reproductions of photographs. I am particularly indebted to Elize Schneigansz for her research assistance. Tina Smith, head curator at the District Six Museum, and Paul Grendon, independent photographer in Cape Town, have become dear friends and family, critical interlocutors, and generous colleagues, who introduced me to the thriving world of Cape Town's museums, festivals, and creative and visual arts, and have refined my understanding of diverse cultures and practices of knowledge production. I am grateful to Paul Grendon for allowing me to use some of his photographs in the book. Research for the book also included regular visits to Namibia, where I worked in various archives and collections. My thanks go to the National Archives of Namibia and to their retired head archivist Werner Hillebrecht, who continues to be generous and helpful whenever I need advice in locating photographs and contextualising them in a history of archival acquisition, conservation, and classification that remains, at times, nebulous. My Namibian colleagues have always been supportive of my work and have made the many visits and research initiatives over the past two decades always pleasurable and successful. My thanks go to Martha Akawa and Godman Gwasira at the University of Namibia, Saara Ilovu at the Usakos Museum, and last but not least to Jeremy Silvester at the Museums Association of Namibia. In 2013 I returned to Europe and took up a post in the History Department at the University of Bielefeld, Germany. My thanks go to Angelika Epple for her commitment to make African history part of the curriculum there. I enjoyed two years of teaching, and the possibility to think about my work in Southern Africa within the framework of transnational and global history. Between 2015 and 2017 I had the privilege to spend two years at Harvard University, first as a visiting scholar at the Center for African Studies and later as the Oppenheimer fellow at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. The years spent at Harvard provided the perfect academic environment for writing the book, and many colleagues there have shared ideas and made critical comments on earlier drafts of chapters. My gratitude and thanks go to Jean and John Comaroff, who have been mentors and friends for many years. Their scholarly creativity and rigour, and their intellectual generosity are exceptional; the many conversations in Cambridge, Basel, and Cape Town were simply wonderful.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. was a generous host at the Hutchins Center, and I am grateful to him for creating a fellowship programme that enables scholars from across the world and the disciplines to meet and engage with each other's work. Christian Crouch and Gaiutra Bahadur have been wonderful co-fellows; my thinking and writing on history and photography has benefited enormously from our exchanges and conversations during the Hutchins Center Fellows Colloquium. My sincere thanks go to Krishna Lewis and to her colleagues, all of whom have made the fellows feel at home.

Writing this book would never have been possible without my closest colleagues in Basel, Dag Henrichsen at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB) and Giorgio Miescher at the University of Basel. They are outstanding scholars of Namibia and Southern Africa, with whom I share a very long intellectual relationship and a passion for Namibian history. Dag Henrichsen and his colleagues at the BAB have made my work in their archives and library always pleasant, and particular thanks go to Susanne Hubler for helping with locating photographs and securing permission to publish. Giorgio Miescher has read all the chapters and made critical comments throughout. Many more colleagues have read earlier versions and have critically engaged the arguments proposed in the book whenever I presented them in colloquia, seminars, and lectures. My thanks go to Jean and John Comaroff, Geoff Eley, Julia Thomas, William Beinart, James Merron, Luregn Lenggenhager, and Zeynep Gürsel. Finally, I remain deeply thankful to the late Patrick Harries, whose passion for Southern African pasts and presents and curiosity for ways of writing history that were not his made him an exceptional mentor and friend.

Basel, January 2019

Introduction

Shades of empire

My interest in writing a book on photography and history in colonial Southern Africa has come from different directions and was inspired by a variety of research questions. Some of the original concerns have survived the unforeseen twists and turns of the writing process, and they therefore deserve mention. Obvious, perhaps, is the initial charm of the Southern African collections of historical photographs themselves: their intricate visuality, materiality, and sensuality; their troubling appearance but ultimate aesthetic appeal; their privileged status in the archive; and their unsettling ability to literally bring the past before our eyes all held the promise of an opening towards writing history of a different kind.[1]

Certainly, historians have long shown curiosity about photographs as historical sources – not just since the visual turn – and by the late 1990s, visual history began to flourish in Southern African academic research and writing.[2] More specifically in South Africa and Namibia, this shift in intellectual discourse concurred with a critical revision of academic history articulated under the auspices of public history, museum and heritage, and memory studies.[3] Here, historical photographs featured prominently, since they strongly resonated with the desire to recover people, places, and times lost to the physical and social ruination brought about by colonialism, segregation, and apartheid.[4] There is no doubt that across an increasingly diverse range of articulations of historical consciousness, photography has been considered particularly appealing because of the tangible and visceral encounter with people's history that it offers, and its conduciveness to a more subjective reframing of the past and an imaginative conception of the future.[5] In the past 25 years, historical photographs have, in short, invigorated and enriched the production of Southern African historical narratives that strove to speak to the present in more pertinent and meaningful ways.[6]

The revision of Southern African history in the post-apartheid era and the accompanying critical role of visual history formed the framework within which *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* came into being. However, my primary interest in this project arose from a theoretical probing of the historical status of photography, on the basis of which one would have to ask a set of specific questions: How do photographs become historical

evidence? How do they acquire historical meaning? What do photographs tell us about the past? How and why would one propose an account of Southern African pasts that is based primarily on historical photographs? What does it mean to write not a history *of* photography, but one made *by* photographs?[7] And how and why, finally, would we narrate an allusive, incomplete, contingent, scrappy kind of history that arises from photographic images?[8] These questions have been addressed from different scholarly perspectives, in and beyond the discipline of history, and, as will become clear throughout the book, they all reflect an interest in unsettling the certainties of historical method and interpretation, especially once photography helps reveal the partial nature of any historical inscription and understanding.[9]

Underlying most contemporary theorising are, more or less explicitly, the works of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Roland Barthes, and their deliberations on photography and history remain critical to the arguments proposed here. Those arguments will especially be concerned with the ways in which these authors reflected on analogies between thinking of history and thinking of photography, pointing to their shared ontological, conceptual, and epistemological grounds. Dismissing what Benjamin and Kracauer in particular saw as the delusive historicist belief in holistic recuperation and cognition, they all fostered an understanding of the past as a series of fleeting moments and fragmented images, and of the assemblage of those moments and images as history as a mere act of mimetic inscription and citation, reproduction, and repetition.[10] If anything, photographic reality and historical reality were, to all of them, inherently instable, incoherent, and discontinuous.[11] The language is conducive for assessing how they conceived of the photographic image, medium, and technology as a useful metaphor for understanding not only the concept of history, but also, and especially, the reconfiguration of the relationship between history and memory, a mediation that they all deemed to be a key feature of modern experience and thought.[12]

Notwithstanding the current enthusiasm for these "classics", there is, I believe, a need for a word of caution. As much as Benjamin and his peers have pushed us onto new, if sometimes uncertain theoretical terrain, it is important to keep in mind that their interest was more in the philosophy of history and the politics of aesthetics than in doing and writing history *per se*. Therefore, remaining solely in their company would lead down the garden path, especially if we sail in the misty lee of nostalgia, loss, and death.[13] More importantly, perhaps, these particular thinkers do not resolve methodological and analytical problems that arise once we attempt to explain how specific photographs distinguish themselves from any other historical form in a given context, and how they might have become meaningful in the different institutional and discursive realms in which they were produced, circulated, and viewed.[14] Caution is not dismissal, though, and there are reasons to continue to interrogate Benjamin, Kracauer, and Barthes – and obviously the rich literature that draws on their work – while concurrently keeping theory on

the ground and remaining committed to probing philosophical abstraction against the contingencies and distinctions of historical specificity.

Obviously, this is where historical inquiries are most promising and confident. But there are further reasons for placing historical photographs in particular cultural, institutional, or visual contexts, without assuming these to be given, fixed, unified, or coherent.[15] We shall do so especially because contextualising helps counter the tendency and temptation to understand photographs as signature images that stand in for ideas, ideologies, disciplines, and politics, or modes of vision assumed to be characteristic of certain periods and localities.[16] The category of "colonialist photography" is just one expression of the described tendency, but clearly one amongst those that needs critical revision in a book on photography in colonial Southern Africa.

I have adopted a few strategies throughout this work that helped to "keep theory on the ground". However, if readers expect a history of photography *per se* in Southern Africa – one that moves from the introduction of the medium in South Africa in the mid-1840s to its spread across the subcontinent and use by European missionaries and colonial bureaucrats; white amateur and professional photographers, adventurers, explorers, scientists, and settlers; and, finally, possibly since the interwar period but certainly after World War II, Africans themselves – they will be disappointed.[17] Rather, the main interest that was and remains formative for *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* was in exploring how the region's history could be narrated on the basis of historical photographs, and if such a project would differ from accounts that privilege the written record. The geographical focus is on South Africa and Namibia, the pairing arising from South African colonial rule in Namibia, which began after the German defeat in 1915 and ended with Namibian independence in 1990. As a result, Namibia was incorporated into an expanding and thickening territorial and social landscape marked by racial segregation and apartheid, within which the colony and its inhabitants were relegated to the backwaters of a fraught and foul modernity.[18] However, this embroiled history and its repercussions, which explain at least part of the enduring condition of coloniality in both countries, remain strangely ignored, especially in South African history.

Scholarly shyness of more integrated understandings of the South African-Namibian intertwining has been explained by the failure to recognise the intricacy of empire, colonialism, and nation in the sub-region, which can hardly be reconciled with imperial histories drafted on metropolitan, that is to say British and French, models.[19] This critique has not merely been a nod towards the fashionable paradigms of transnational or entangled history.[20] What is at stake, rather, is an attempt to overcome the teleological understanding of South Africa's gradual disengagement from the British Empire, and to reckon its emergence and consolidation as a modern nation-state (though tainted by internal colonisation) precisely in the light of Namibia's complicated trajectories through German and South African colonialisms, and the latter's entanglement with multiple South African and European metropoles.[21] This line

of argument was expected to enable a more dynamic approach, which understands empire and nation not as abstracted categories, but as variable historical manifestations and emerging properties of power and sovereignty, marked by the uneven spread of capitalism and colonialism throughout the Southern African region, expanding external and internal frontiers, shifting territorialities, and ever-changing regimes of difference.[22]

Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa builds on these earlier attempts to rethink history in the region, especially where these have opened ways of thinking about empire in terms of networks and circuits along which things and ideas moved – within and between nations and colonies, metropoles and peripheries. This is empire as a way of knowing and being, a constellation of power and authority that engendered how people and things were continuously made and unmade, assembled and dispersed. It is, essentially, along these lines that we can explore what we gain from unearthing the layers of South African-Namibian historical entanglement *through* photography. Such an approach involves asking a number of questions that aim at explaining how empire and colonialism conditioned the spread of photography in the region, and how, conversely, photographs projected and mediated, represented and moulded, and scrutinised and contested the idea and experience of the colonial endeavour and its modernising claims. How did colonial power relations and administrative structures imposed by the colonial, segregationist, and apartheid states shape the production, circulation, and consumption of photographs? What kind of visual economies emerged in the wake of colonial and capitalist penetration in the region in this period? What readings did disciplinary regimes and discourses of race and ethnicity, imposed by science and modernising state institutions, encourage or enforce?[23]

Scholars of visual history have explained how German and South African colonial occupation determined and, ultimately, obstructed the emergence of a strong and diverse photographic culture in Namibia up until the 1960s.[24] The plurality of colonialisms engendered complex visual and knowledge economies – be it as part of South Africa's efforts to substantiate its claim to the Namibian territory vis-à-vis the international community, German photographic production that continued after Germany's defeat and loss of the colony in 1915, or importantly, if harder to retrace, African engagements with the medium since the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, the relationship between photography and colonialism, and image and power remain historically and theoretically complicated.[25] Also, as the editors of *Colonising Camera* have argued, the Namibian case illustrates how much the circuits of power and knowledge can run on different courses. The trajectories of photographs into the archive indeed proved complicated, and their accumulation and preservation in various collections was often haphazard, uneven, and anonymous.[26] This "messiness" of the Namibian photographic archive is in part to be explained by its status as a peripheral entity, constituted in defining ways in the shadow of South African institutional and knowledge hegemony. Similar inquiries into the

significance of photographies produced on the margins, Namibian and other, within the South African visual landscape remain, unfortunately, much less pursued.[27]

However, *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* is not just an attempt to write Namibian visual history into an alleged South African photographic canon. Instead, I am interested in intersections, not only the ones that point to entangled histories, but also those that enable us to rethink the categories, chronologies, and scales that shape historical thinking and writing. As suggested earlier, such rethinking will be based on considering historical photographs as images and objects; it will evolve once we linger on their visuality and materiality, before retracing their trajectories within and beyond institutional and discursive domains, through geographical space and historical time. It will also emerge from the clusters in which photographs assembled with other images, texts, objects, and bodies, and acquired meaning within multiple material constellations while moving from one context of viewing to another. Finally, the possibility of historical revision will accrue from configuring photography not as a set of images and material objects alone, but as a field of *practices*, which includes placing oneself in front of a camera as much as producing photographs; collecting, curating, and displaying photographic images; and reactivating them in different forms of historical inquiry and representation.[28]

Such an approach will require us to remain close and attentive to the visual archives of South Africa and Namibia and to move to the foreground particular photographs preserved within these archives. The point of departure for each of the following chapters is a specific photographic collection; what links them conceptually throughout the book is a continuous concern with how the archive shaped photographic production in the region. Here, *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* builds on a consolidated critique of the colonial archive, now conceived as less of a material repository of historical data and more of a process, discursive framework, and a set of relations within which historical evidence and "hierarchies of credibility" are produced.[29] Mining content has given way to paying attention to archival placement and form.[30] Furthermore, as an expression of a deep scepticism of colonial knowledge production tout court, scholars have increasingly argued that what constitutes the archive, the form it takes, and the systems of classification and epistemology it engenders essentially reflect critical features of colonial politics and state power.[31] In light of such justified suspicion of colonial knowledge production, including in its postcolonial formulation, exposing the problems of "colonial photographs" as historical sources seems pertinent.[32] What enables them to constitute truthful representations of reality? In what way does their realist and evidentiary claim depend on the material effects of a unifying archive? As is well-known, nineteenth-century regimes of truth, optical empiricism, *and* systems of record-keeping were constitutive of and constituted by photography's deployment in scientific knowledge production and as part of the (Colonial) state's surveillance apparatus.[33] But

nineteenth-century photographic realism and instrumentality alone cannot serve as ground on which to sound photography's status as an historical and archival object. Rather, we need to explain what the specific requirements of evidence are in a given context, at a given moment, and ask what status, *other than evidence*, photographs have as historical form, both within the constraints of the colonial archive and, crucially, beyond it.[34]

The critical revision of the archive will remain essential throughout the following chapters, all of which highlight the ways in which historical photographs constitute a series of micro-intentions rather than reflections of universalising desires.[35] Still, *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* continues to analyse photographic archives precisely regarding the desires, intentions, hopes, and expectations that the archive attributes to the visual, without assuming photographs to function – inevitably, let alone effectively – as vehicles of cultural meaning or instruments of colonial power.[36] But why should we emphasise the need for a careful, ethnographic reading of the archive, and why do this in the context of Southern African visual history? As suggested earlier, there continues to be a tendency to understand South African and Namibian history within the teleological framework of colonial penetration and the consolidation of first the segregationist and then the apartheid state, with their ultimate dismantlement by nationalist resistance and emancipation.[37] Photographic archives simultaneously sediment and disrupt this narrative of the rise and fall of colonial state power and apartheid; they validate and belie the solidity of colonial epistemology and rationality; and they assert and question what is retrievable and knowable. The aim here, therefore, is to refine and complicate our understanding of photography's ambiguous effects on Southern African history and its archival mediation. And yet, there might be, once again, the need to keep our feet on the ground. This book clearly wishes to push the limits of archival credibility. As others have done, it argues that in some instances it proves more productive not to reduce archival narratives to fiction, but to understand them as institutional formations and mechanisms that had real effects, since they imposed some readings over others and foreclosed some interpretations while encouraging others.[38] Rather than trapping ourselves in an intractable split between construction and deconstruction, it seems more important not to fetishise photographic archives but to keep an eye on both the capabilities *and* limits of archival authority. Finally, we need to remind ourselves that there is a world of images and visual practices that never left a trace in the archive, as much as there are myriads of photographs that, once they entered archival collections, lay dormant for an indefinite time.

It is clear by now that *Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa* will follow a rather circular line of thinking. Historians of photography are familiar with moments at which it looks as if photographs raise more questions than provide answers to what happened in the past.[39] The more we devote ourselves to photographic images, the more they seem enigmatic, vague, and contradictory. The desire to understand Southern African history through

the lens of photography takes us onto slippery paths, and it remains a challenge to decide how to shore up an emerging historical interpretation, which refuses to write off uncertainty, ambiguity, and conjecture. But the leap into the unknown releases forms of creativity and enables a "combing" of history and theory, which commits itself to thinking and writing about collections of historical photographs in a productive and refined way, rather than to any particular disciplinary convention or canon – historical or other.[40] This is, however, less an argument in favour of the interdisciplinarity engraved in visual studies, than an interest in *indiscipline*.[41] My main concern is in describing a problem – the relationship between photography and history – and to find historical and theoretical avenues through which to propose a careful discussion of particular Southern African photographs. The result is a book structured less chronologically – as historians might still find preferable – but more along a visual thread specified by a selection of photographic collections and woven into a broad-meshed theoretical fabric. The photographs themselves, the kinds of questions they raise, the kinds of structures of viewing and knowing they enact, and the kinds of interpretations they induce, thence, determine the methodology. However, I am not suggesting a prescribed path of inquiry, an interrogatory space defined by particular photographs. Rather, I am describing a series of archival encounters that generated a range of analytical possibilities and encouraged a particular theoretical interrogation.[42] Thus, while the chapter titles might appear to go adrift, each pursuing its own idiosyncratic interest, they simply delineate the book's different entry points to an entangled photographic landscape. Still, readers might value more detailed explanations of the historical, visual, and analytical connections at work.

Chapter 1 – *Assemblage: Photography and colonial policing in German South West Africa 1910–1913* – looks at a collection of police and prison photographs and its affiliated textual archive from Namibia under German colonial rule. It pays careful attention to the ways in which we encounter these photographs in the archive – their placement, visuality, and materiality – and explains the specific contexts in which the images were produced. Based on a meticulous archival probing, the chapter argues that while the main photographic project pursued by the German colonial administration was originally coined as an exercise in modern criminalistics, it ultimately failed to yield most of the desired results. The photographs, registers of prisoners, lists of escaped convicts, fingerprints, and anthropometric measurements did not allow for the systematic identification of African subjects or the control of their movement, residence, and employment histories. In other words, while we encounter a copious pool of archival documents, the material defies a consistent and unified historical account of a modernising state bureaucracy and its surveillance apparatus. In view of this interpretative impasse, but assuming that the administrative endeavour did have effects, if unanticipated ones, the chapter considers the collection of police and prison photographs within the framework of assemblage theory.[43] Thereby, it succeeds in explaining how the visual work done by the police

and penal system in the German colony spilled out of its institutional and discursive bounds and reassembled in new material and virtual formations. Three instances of such dispersals are discussed in depth: settler photography and the conflation of surveillance and desire; physical anthropology and counterinsurgency; and fingerprinting and racial science.

Chapter 2 – *Bodies and things: Photography and the person in Southern Africa, 1920s–1960s* – continues along similar lines, though it shifts attention from the institutional to the individual level by discussing the role of photography for the classification and identification of bodies along the lines of race, gender, and citizenship more systematically.[44] Photography – as one of the indexical modalities of the visual (fingerprinting being the other one) – was an important domain in which citizens and subjects negotiated state imposed epistemologies of the body. The chapter draws on two theoretical propositions in order to frame the discussion: Roberto Esposito's "Dispositif of the Person", and Thomas Lemke's expanded understanding of Foucault's notion of governmentality that considers the multiple *conjunctions between bodies and things*.[45] Using a large archive of identity documents, travel certificates, permits, labour recruitment passes, and passports produced between the 1920s and 1960s, the chapter explores how photographs were harnessed for classification and typology, reification, and abstraction. But likewise, we'll explain how every photograph swayed between serving as a visual synecdoche of race, tribe, ethnicity, or nationality on the one hand, and disclosing the partiality and fragmentation, specificity, and contingency of all these categories on the other hand. The issuing of identity documents is usually understood within the domain of state action that generally produced repressive visual forms, such as in the case of the South African enforcement of the *dompas* system. Still, even within bureaucratic registration, we find a remarkable diversity in aesthetic language and visual practice that made space for African agencies, self-articulations, and critiques of the hegemonic claims enforced by racial projects under segregation and apartheid. Some of these contestations come into view once we pay attention to African photographers' involvement in government schemes, and the photographic subjects' efforts to draft subaltern notions of personhood, individual positionality, and embodied experiences of belonging. In a more theoretical gesture, finally, the chapter explains how various bureaucratic projects assumed that the body, the person, and the photographic image conditioned and constituted each other, and concurrently, how by placing the making of visual bodies at the centre of historical narration we can transform our understanding of colonial state formation and the constitution of a modern nation in the region.

Chapter 3 – *Augenblick: The moment in Namibian photography, 1930s–1960s* – is, at first sight, a caesura, since it moves more explicitly than the two preceding ones to the question of photography and history. It does so by focusing on one of the key problems in the theory of photography, namely "the burden of the moment".[46] Photographs are understood to either capture a moment, a mere fragment of time, an elusive, accidental or even trivial

instant, or to freeze time by extracting a particular moment and turning it into something significant, momentous, and something that resonates with what philosophers call the *Augenblick*. It is this tension between the transient and the persistent, between the arbitrary and the essential that complicates photography's relationship to time, history, and memory, and conditions the way we correlate the photographic and the historical event. The chapter explores what particular historical photographs from Southern Africa tell us about this relationship by investigating the kind of analytical work moment and Augenblick do once we think about these concepts not as abstractions alone, but within a specific historical situation. The first part considers the work of "white" photographers in Namibia. Settler photography was fundamental in shaping the colonial Southern African aesthetic order, and throughout most of the twentieth century, numerous settlers became amateur or professional photographers in Namibia and were deeply troubled by the question of race.[47] By investigating how settler photography oscillated between the moment and the momentous, the first part of the chapter retraces "white" photographers' attempts to enforce and stabilise particular notions of racialised subjectivity. This concerned the articulation of both whiteness and blackness, or the representation of landscape, and it essentially turned race into a matter and modality of seeing.[48] The second part of the chapter moves on to the contemporaneous work of African itinerant photographers and present-day women collectors of historical photographs in Usakos, a central Namibian town, in order to investigate if and how the moment and Augenblick of photography in the aesthetic encounter between Africans differed from the one in settler photography. It offers a discussion of private photographic collections from a former African location and argues that the photographs assembled here give way to important contestations of the hegemonic visual order. These contestations concern, on the one hand, the temporality of Augenblick, which explicitly depends on the photographs' movements in and out of history, memory, and at times nostalgia; on the other hand, they speak more explicitly to Augenblick's spatial connotations, i.e. its philosophical conception as both an instant *and* a site of historical awareness and transformation.

Chapter 4 – *Heterotopia: Aerial photography and mapping in the Eastern Cape, 1930s–1960s* – invites readers, once again, to adjust to a significant shift in scale and embark on a vertiginous transition to a peculiar space-time configuration: aerial photography in the Eastern Cape in the period between the 1930s and 1960s. The chapter investigates what this specific form of visualisation and the terrains it produced tell us about the relationship between photography and history. Aerial photographs are commonly associated with military intelligence and surveillance, in Southern Africa and beyond; but they also became a favoured visual means in the everyday civilian, bureaucratic, and technocratic understanding and management of both the physical and social landscapes across the region.[49] Thus, aerial photography was crucial for the modernist projects in the late segregationist and apartheid periods. They are evidence of a strong interest in developing a distinct aesthetic language for landscape,

which would help substantiate the preoccupation with a residential racial order. Theoretically, aerial photography has long been understood in terms of the Foucauldian model of panoptic vision and the idea of an omniscient gaze; yet, more recent debates have noted how the general monolith of visual panopticism tends to swallow the histories of diverse archives and specific localities. In line with this critique, formulated for example in the work of Paula Amad, the chapter explores how the extensive purview of aerial photography relates to the enclosed, small-scale, but no less totalising world of the archive.[50] In other words, the chapter investigates how aerial photographs provided the means to perceive the world as an expressive, skin-like surface and, thereby, encouraged an understanding of the surface as an event, a readable text, and living archive. Presuming that aerial photography constituted a distinct view – rather than a mere mimetic reproduction of reality – which countered everyday perception and brought together seemingly incompatible sites, the chapter finally explores how the collections of photographs discussed here took on heterotopian qualities: as visual emplacements that seemed untrue to, but were still based in everyday reality; and as flattened and geometricised imag(in)ings, which replicated, exaggerated, reduced, or transformed a particular place – the Eastern Cape – into a representational space in which temporal juxtapositions, ambiguities, and contradictions would be intensely felt.[51]

Finally, and in line with the book's circling form of reasoning, Chapter 5 – *Presence: The Breakwater prison albums, Cape Town, 1890s–1990s* – takes us back to the beginning and even beyond. The chapter considers a series of photographic albums produced at the Breakwater Convict Station in Cape Town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It examines the extent to which this photographic project resonated with the global proliferation of Bertillonage and was part of an attempt to professionalise the penal system at the Cape.[52] Yet, the photographs were also the product of a distinct local and historically contingent negotiation of how the medium would help constitute a particular subject of rule: the modern prisoner. The first part of the chapter revises some of the standard arguments in the literature and offers an analysis of the albums' complicated position in the archive that circumvents an easy blending of the image/object into the narrative of a colonial disciplinary, let alone a panoptic regime of vision. Instead, it pays attention to the archival, semantic, and aesthetic ambiguities of the photographs and the ways in which colonial prison and police institutions attempted to contain these. Exploring Susan Buck-Morss' idea of (an) aesthetics in the prison context, one of the main concerns in this first part is to highlight the intricacy of the imprisoned subject's growing exposure to an environment marked by a set of technologies, including photography, which regulated time, space, and the body.[53] Obviously, this discussion resonates with the one proposed in Chapter 1, though the grounds shared between the two parts of the book are historical as much as analytical. But the affinity is partial, and it comes to an end in Chapter 5's second part, which looks at contemporary readings of this body of historical prison

photographs within the framework of genealogical and memory studies in contemporary South Africa. Here, we explore yet another instance of photography's role in mediating the past through readings that seek to address one of the critical concerns of historical narrative: the tension between representation, i.e. the preoccupation with historical meaning, and *presence*, i.e. the movement away from a constructed past to a past that actually existed and speaks to us in a presumably unmediated way through things that we can feel, touch, and see.[54] Portraits of African historical subjects that survive in photographic collections prove to be, as the chapter shows, particularly pertinent to the desire for a return to the presence of the past.

Photography and History in Colonial Southern Africa, in sum, delves into a specific selection of photographic collections, and in each case, it does so through the lens of a particular theoretical problem. However, there are lines of thought that run through all the chapters. As discussed earlier, reflecting on the colonial archive is one of them. The preceding outline of the book's structure makes it clear that a further inquiry pursued consistently is the problem of time and space, and their respective configuration in photography and history. Here, discourse on photography has emphasised the ways in which the photographic image complicates the clear distinction between past, present, and future, defying, as it were, the continuous flow of historical time. Photographs constitute fragments of both time *and* space, yet they have an unsettling ability to fix and recreate – *re-present* – the object they extract from a "there and then" in the "here and now".[55] Distance to history is reduced, reality freed from the conditions of time and space, and the past's presence in the image conflated into the image itself.[56] Though we might raise strong objections against such reasoning, at least photographic fragmentation remains critical for questioning the idea of temporal continuity and spatial homogeneity.[57] It is at this point where photography highlights a tension within the discipline of history: the questioning of unified categories of time and space – so intrinsic to theories of modernisation – versus the preference for a notion of multiple temporalities and spatialities, and their mutual conditioning.[58] This tension resonates, again, with the writings of Benjamin, Kracauer, and Barthes, who, as we noted earlier, had long taken note of analogies between photographic image and medium and the making of history. I would like to close this introduction by briefly resuming the line of thought from a slightly different angle, one that helps us conceive of photography and history more explicitly as two modalities of mediating and conceptualising space-time constellations. This is not to say that photography and history are or do the same, notwithstanding occasional, almost bizarre overstatements in the form of – "there can be no thinking of history that is not at the same time a thinking of photography".[59] Such reductions and generalisations are not for those who wish to understand their relationship by explaining what specific photographic archives and collections tell us about the ways in which time and space are thought of in a particular historical context. The moment has come, therefore, to turn to Southern Africa.

Notes

1 See Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*. Princeton, 1997, p. xvii.
2 For a discussion of the place of photography in historical writing see Jennifer Tucker in collaboration with Tina Campt, Entwined Practices. Engagements with Photography in Historical Inquiry. *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 48, 2009: 1–8. On the visual or pictorial turn see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Communication*. Chicago and London, 1995, p. 11. For writings on photography in Southern Africa, especially South Africa and Namibia, see Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, Photography, History and Memory, in Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester, and Patricia Hayes (eds.), *The Colonising Camera. Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*. Cape Town, Windhoek, Athens, 1998, pp. 2–9.
3 Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, South Africa and the Unsettling of History, in ibid., *Unsettled History. Making South African Public Pasts*. Ann Arbor, 2017, pp. 1–26.
4 See e.g. Darren Newbury, 'Lest We Forget': Photography and the Presentation of History at the Apartheid Museum, Gold Reef City, and the Hector Pieterson Museum, Soweto. *Visual Communication*, 4, 3, 2005: 259–295.
5 See Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian. Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918*. Durham, 2012, p. 7. This resonates with what Batchen called the "future anterior of presence", see Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire. The Conception of Photography*. Cambridge (MA), 1997, p. 213.
6 Annie E. Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*. Durham, 2003.
7 Patricia Hayes, Introduction: Visual Genders. *Gender & History*, 17, 3, 2005: 519–37, here p. 520. Hayes makes this argument based on Christopher Pinney, *"Photos of the Gods": The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. London, 2004, p. 9; Hayden White in conversation with Ethan Kleinberg, Center for the Humanities, Wesleyan University, published online in October 2013 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViG30Fkz2cI].
8 Patricia Spyer, Photography's Framings and Unframings: A Review Article. *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 43, 1, 2001: 181–92, here p. 189.
9 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories. Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. Oxford, New York, 2001, p. 10; see also Jean and John L. Comaroff, Introduction: The Portraits of an Ethnographer as a Young Man, in John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff, and Deborah James (eds.), *Picturing a Colonial Past. The African Photographs of Isaac Schapera*. Chicago, London, 2007, pp. 1–18.
10 Gregory Paschalidis, Images of History and the Optical Unconscious. *Historein* 4, 2003: 33–44; Christine Mehring, Siegfried Kracauer's Theories of Photography: From Weimar to New York. *History of Photography*, 21, 2, 1997: 129–36.
11 Inka Mülder-Bach, The Exile of Modernity. Kracauer's Figurations of the Stranger, in Johannes von Moltke and Gerd Gmünden (eds.), *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*. Ann Arbor, 2012, pp. 276–292, here p. 290.
12 Cadava, *Words of Light*, pp. xviii–xix; Tim Dant and Graeme Willoch, Pictures of the Past. Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5, 1, 2002: 5–23.
13 Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 11.
14 Poole, An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34, 2005: 159–179, here p. 162.
15 See Dominick LaCapra, Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts. *History and Theory*, 19, 3, 1980: 245–76, here p. 247.

16 Elizabeth Edwards, Photographic Uncertainties: Between Evidence and Reassurance. *History and Anthropology*, 25, 2, 2014: 171–88.
17 But see Patricia Hayes, Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography. *Kronos*, 33, 2007: 139–62.
18 Jeremy Silvester, Marion Wallace and Patricia Hayes, "Trees Never Meet". in Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester, Marion Wallace, and Wolfram Hartmann (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule*: *Mobility & Containment 1915–1946*. Oxford, Windhoek, Athens, 1998, pp. 3–48; and more generally Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee-Dube, Introduction: Critical Questions of Colonial Modernities, in ibid. (eds.), *Unbecoming Modern. Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities*. New Delhi, 2006, pp. 1–31.
19 Dag Henrichsen, Giorgio Miescher, Ciraj Rassool and Lorena Rizzo, Rethinking Empire in Southern Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 3, 2015: 431–5.
20 See David Simon (ed.), *South Africa in Southern Africa: Reconfiguring the Region*. Oxford, 1998. For a more general reflection on transnational history, including its possible entanglements with imperialism, see Michael McGerr, The Price of the "New Transnational History". *The American Historical Review*, 96, 4, 1991: 1056–67.
21 Henrichsen et al., Rethinking Empire, p. 433.
22 See Ann L. Stoler and Frederick Cooper, Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda, in A.L. Stoler and F. Cooper (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1997, pp. 1–41; Frederick Cooper, Introduction: Colonial Questions, Historical Trajectories, in ibid., *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2005, pp. 3–32.
23 Deborah Poole, An Excess of Description, pp. 160–1.
24 Hayes et al., Photography, history, and memory, pp. 2–9.
25 Ibid., p. 4; also Elizabeth Edwards, Thinking Photography beyond the Visual?, in J.J. Long, Andrea Noble and Edward Welch, *Photography. Theoretical Snapshots*. Abingdon, New York, 2009, pp. 31–48, here p. 41.
26 Hayes et al., Photography, History, Memory, p. 7.
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30 Ann Laura Stoler, Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance. *Archival Science*, 2, 2002: 87–109, here p. 90.
31 Stoler, Colonial Archives, p. 87.
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34 Edwards, *Raw Histories*, pp. 12–13. The discussion anticipated here concerns the ways in which *Photography and History*, and especially Chapter 3, reflect on thinking about photographs as "historical evidence" or, alternatively, of "photographic events". See more generally Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London, 2004, p. 122.
35 Poole, An Excess of Description, p. 162.
36 W.T.J. Mitchell, What Do Pictures "Really" Want? *October*, 77, 1996: 71–82.
37 See e.g. William Beinart and Saul Dubow, Introduction: The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid, in ibid. (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*. London, New York, 1995, pp. 1–24.
38 Stoler, In Cold Blood, p. 183; Stoler, Colonial Archives, p. 91.
39 Edwards, Photographic Uncertainties, p. 176.
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43 The chapter opens with Rosanne Kennedy, Jonathon Zapasnik, Hannah McCann and Miranda Bruce, All Those Little Machines: Assemblage as Transformative Theory. *Australian Humanities Review*, 55, 2013: 45–66.
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51 See e.g. Peter Johnson, The Geographies of Heterotopia. *Geography Compass*, 7, 11, 2013: 790–803.
52 See Keith Breckenridge, Introduction: The Global Biometric Arena, in ibid., *Biometric State. The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*. Cambridge, 2014, pp. 1–26.
53 Susan Buck-Morss, Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered. *October*, 62, 1992: 3–41.
54 Ranjan Ghosh and Ethan Kleinberg (eds.), *Presence. Philosophy, History, and Cultural Theory for the Twenty-First Century*. Ithaca and London, 2013.

55 André Bazin and Hugh Gray, The Ontology of the Photographic Image. *Film Quarterly*, 13, 4, 1960: 4–9, here p. 8; Roland Barthes, The Rhetoric of the Image, in ibid., *Image, Music, Text*. New York, 1977, pp. 152–63, here pp. 158–9; Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 8.
56 Cadava, *Words of Light*, p. xxiv.
57 Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch, Pictures of the Past. Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5, 1, 2002: 5–25.
58 See e.g. Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*. Budapest, New York, 2008; Charles W.J. Withers, Place and the "Spatial Turn" in Geography and in History. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70, 4, 2009: 637–58.
59 Cadava, *Words of Light*, p. xviii.

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1 Assemblage

Photography and colonial policing in German South West Africa, 1910–1913

Horizon

Whenever police photographs from the period of German colonial rule in Namibia come into view, they are, almost inevitably, outlined against the horizon of the South West African War of 1904–1908. Widely understood as the first genocide of the twentieth century, the war has figured as one of the key subject matters of Namibian, and to a lesser extent German, historiography.[1] On the sidelines of a predominant preoccupation with questions of violence, catastrophe, annihilation, and trauma – habitually substantiated with illustrating images of captivity, mutilation, starvation, and death – there have been occasional attempts to understand and study the visual economy of the war and its afterlife as a historical problem in its own right.[2] While there was no official, systematic visual propaganda that came along with the war, thousands of illustrations, postcards, and photographs – all authored by the colonial rulers – circulated widely in contemporary German magazines, colonial literature, and coffee-table books. Images of German colonial soldiers and their heroic deeds on battlefields stylised as sites of technological and industrial achievement were expected to fuel public support and enthusiasm for the war in the metropole. Photographs of imprisoned African men, women, and children herded together in concentration camps or public executions and hangings of demonised foes conjured the triumph and legitimacy of a brutal but fateful battle fought by civilised soldiery against a barbarian race. Depictions of African men and women, spared from death and deportation but coerced into captivity and forced labour, claimed to evidence the just punishment inflicted on those who had dared to revolt.[3]

A more recent and sustained interest in the colonial war as genocide, and its imagery – including sensitive photographs that display the limit of historical retrospection's voyeurism[4] – finds expression in a number of historiographical reaches, among them the (post-colonial) engagement with Germany's violent colonial past, and the preoccupation with anticolonial and resistance histories cultivated in Namibian academic and public debates to this day.[5] Photographs have crowded scholarly and public representations of the war in various ways, whereby there has been a disconcerting willingness to deploy

photographic images as evidence underscoring the discourses of both genocide and resistance.[6] In doing so, the present debates have sometimes provided, unintentionally perhaps, older tendentious usage of photographs with a problematic resonance chamber, in particular those images that were published in the context of First World War British colonial propaganda aimed at decrying German imperialism, as much as abetting its own interests.[7] In addition to these unquestioned continuities of the visual evidentiary, there are deeper difficulties that concern the terms and categories on which one grounds historical understandings of the South West African war, and the photographs that are brought into its orbit.[8]

In her critique of the "scholarly fashion" to read imperial violence as genocide, Nancy Rose Hunt has recently pointed to a set of problems in producing simple narratives that congeal spectacular violence as *event* and wedge historical imagination into a dualism between horror and humanitarianism.[9] The South West African War and its lasting perceptual salience in academic and public consciousness is as much a case in point as Hunt's area of interest, Colonial Congo.[10] In both cases, photography played a significant role in mediating atrocity, death, and trauma.[11] Hence, moving away from the spectacular visual dispositive of the war – and the iconography of concentration camps – towards the less exceptional and ordinary, from the singular to the plural, repetitive, and everyday, will help attenuate the sharp contours of a circumscribed event that has neatly been differentiated from a single *before* and *aftermath*. This is not to say that tremendous violence was not part of German colonialism in Namibia before, during, and after the war of 1904–1908. But the historical iterations and trajectories of persecution, violence, and death might be less linear or resolved. Indeed, police photographs from German South West Africa chart a situation and milieu that troubles the epistemological clarity of war – as for example in *war photography*.[12] Images produced in contexts of surveillance and imprisonment, albeit or precisely because they pertain to structurally repressive realms, point to the intricacy and multiplicity of historical terrains on which colonised subjects experienced forms of persecution, wrongdoing, and violation. For them, one is tempted to say, the distinction between war and peace was likely to be less effective or pertinent.

Vignette

In early August 1911, the central government in Windhoek announced the imminent establishment of a police records department. As Governor Theodor Seitz, who authored the instruction, noted, the new department accounted for the government's intent to consolidate the main "auxiliary sciences" in criminalistics – identification and crime scene photography, dactyloscopy (i.e. the registration of fingerprints), and a book of mug shots, or – as contemporaries would have called it – a rogues gallery.[13] The governor's advice was not articulated out of thin air, but actually arose from prior efforts undertaken across the colonial bureaucracy in the field of policing and

criminal identification, as much as these efforts had remained haphazard and unsystematic. A first demand for action had emerged as early as 1906, when Governor Friedrich von Lindequist – Seitz's predecessor – bemoaned the intrusion of what he called "criminal gangs" from the Cape, who were said to exploit chaotic conditions caused by the war ravaging German South West Africa at the time. Von Lindequist suspected delinquents of all sorts of rapidly expanding activities across the territory and of being, as he suggested, up to "serious mischief" in and around the coastal town of Swakopmund.[14] In view of these alarming trends, he hoped to close ranks in relation to the matter and persuade the Cape Town authorities to provide Windhoek with photographs of and personal information about the brigands, whom he expected to have entered police records as a matter of course. In exchange, von Lindequist held out the prospect of ceding photographs taken of detainees in the German colony to the Cape police forces. But the German consul in Cape Town curbed the governor's enthusiasm, and von Lindequist's initiative was set aside – allegedly, to support more temperate, diplomatic procedure; but the initiative probably failed because of the immediate and urgent demands of an ongoing war.[15]

Still, while transnational policing proved utopian, the domestic ignorance of investigative work, the governor noted, would not remain unchanged for much longer. Tentative beginnings could indeed be identified: firstly, the Windhoek police had explored modern methodologies – notably fingerprinting and simplified measurement à la Bertillonage – in 1906 and in Swakopmund in 1908, possibly by those detective constables from Germany and the Cape who had just been relocated to the South West African colony.[16] In addition, in 1907 the central government launched a training course in criminalistics, out of which six locally trained police officers came off with tested honour.[17] As a result, by 1908 the district offices in Windhoek, Swakopmund, and Lüderitzbucht had at least one detective at their command, i.e. a person who had acquired some knowledge of criminal identification – if at first theoretical rather than practical.[18] Yet, von Lindequist's offer to provide the Cape authorities with *photographs* of detainees was undoubtedly pretentious and expressed wishful thinking more than real circumstances. In fact, first attempts to introduce photography to police work were not made until 1909 and were restricted to individual police and district officers trying their hand at basic camera work under preposterous technical, financial, and institutional conditions.[19] Overall, in the second decade of German colonial rule, and certainly until after the end of the war, modern forensic methodology remained a delicate plant of sorts.

Material sprout – the photographic album

The 1911 announcement of a police records department is captivating, in its tone more than in its textual craftsmanship. Governor Seitz's language reads well in its effort to conjure a moment of inauguration, a foundational act that anticipates its future assessment as origin. Yet, 1911 did not mark the

beginnings of South West African modern investigative and identification practices. As it often does, the promises of colonial discourse diverged from actuality, and the expected harvest – a consolidation of criminalistics – failed to materialise. Still, there were some efforts here and there: soon after proclaiming the new departmental initiative, the government published a mandatory injunction to produce personal descriptions of prisoners and take their fingerprints.[20] A 12-page document specified the procedures to be adopted in all major prisons across the colony and required the penal institutions to release the collected data to the police records department in Windhoek and the district authorities in Lüderitzbucht. The envisaged system set its sight on men with "dubious reputation", "professional gangsters", criminals who were meant to be deported from the colony, vagrants and professional beggars, and "shady immigrants and other suspects". Women of comparable savour were likewise brought into focus, and – as was eventually specified – "coloured people" (*Farbige*) as well. To produce valuable descriptions of those criminalised, prison and police officers were urged to adhere closely to Bertillon's anthropometric description (the measurements and *signalement*), which included body height and shape, facial characteristics, hair, gait and posture, and striking features such as scars or tattoos.[21] Additionally, officers were encouraged to register the person's language, his or her clothing and profession, and any other information considered useful for the purpose of identification. Similarly, fingerprints were to be recorded on pre-printed cards, whereby the prescription determined meticulously how to proceed. In March 1912, these regulations were extended to the district offices, all of which were equipped with the necessary materials, i.e. fingerprint cards and ink.[22] While the forms for the measurements and *signalement* provided space for an image as well, requests to take photographs of detainees remained exceptional and a theory more than practice – at least once we cast a glance beyond the central government. Generally, the 1911 instructions seem to have produced meagre yields. A report to the Windhoek authorities authored by the police records department drew sober conclusions:

> The orders given by the government on the 22nd of April 1912 concerning the registration and submission of fingerprint cards with personal description and photograph seem to have attracted little interest from the district offices. Fingerprint cards were hitherto submitted by the offices in Lüderitzbucht, Swakopmund and Gibeon, with photographs only Lüderitzbucht and Swakopmund; they concern whites and coloureds. With the exception of Lüderitzbucht and Gibeon, fingerprint cards are only submitted occasionally, which makes one believe that Swakopmund does not apply the procedure entirely, and all other district offices don't apply it at all.[23]

Notwithstanding the evident disappointment, the report pinned all its hopes on photography, while simultaneously finding fault with the fact that – besides Windhoek and Lüderitzbucht – no district office in the colony owned an official photographic camera. In fact, police officers and detectives repeatedly pointed out the shortage of material resources and deficiency of photographic equipment. Their reports are particularly revealing, as they evidence how official shortcomings gave way to remarkable individual creativity. We read this account of a sergeant based at Swakopmund in 1911:

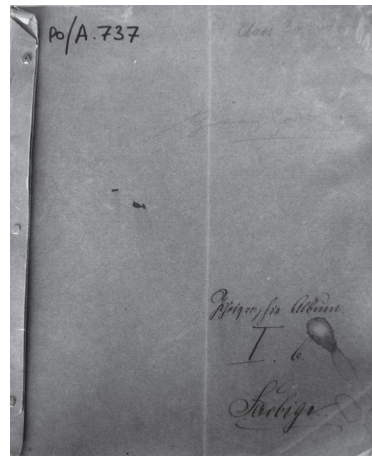
> The lack of a photographic apparatus, which is indispensable for documenting states of affairs, makes itself felt greatly. The official apparatus 4½ × 6 at our disposal is insufficient, and the undersigned bought an apparatus 13 × 18. With this one we have taken the required images throughout last year. Also, there are a number of dangerous coloured criminals (burglars, cattle thieves), and a number of Bushmen are about to be sent here from Grootfontein district. 3 of them just arrived. In my view it is essential to photograph them and to produce exact personal descriptions of them. I have already started to do so, and I attach a copy, which should meet the requirements. I kindly ask to return it. However, the value of this record will not show until later, once it will be necessary to identify criminals after they've committed a crime anew.[24]

For now, the story runs aground. Governor Seitz's "General regulations concerning the use of photographic apparatuses employed by the judicial police" issued in 1914 awkwardly confined themselves to pecuniary matters.[25] The verbosely technocratic document dovetails with a fragmented corpus of archival papers, and there is no discernible narrative. We are almost tempted to say that German colonial criminalistics in South West Africa died before it began, and the whole issue did not lead anywhere. And yet, it did – not in terms of historical progress, but as material densification. The principal form it assumed was a photographic album – hardly the desired outcome or final product of the preceding story so rudely interrupted. At this point in time, while admittedly a notable object, the album – surrounded, as we shall see, by a porous archive – can be no more than the sprout of a material and visual assemblage.

Here we turn to an unusual artefact, the *Fotografie Album 1b Farbige*.[26] Measuring 40 × 33 centimetres, it has to date been kept in the blue cover characteristic of German colonial archival holdings of the time. Fading colour and traces of past handlings convey a textured sense of the album's increasing age. It contains 40 white pages with prefabricated incisions for mounting eight to twelve (and occasionally more) single photographs by their corners on each page. While there is no author and date given, this photographic assemblage's beginnings undoubtedly go back to Governor Seitz's 1911 instructions and his specific mention of a book of mugshots.

The few illegible scribblings on the front and back covers provide little evidence for further clarification; but the "mug shots" are there – in large numbers, lined up one after the other, page after page (Figure 1.1).

Conveniently, the material and visual characteristics of the album are telling – we are obviously concerned here with a particular kind of police



(a)

(b)

Figure 1.1 (a & b) Fotografie Album 1b, Farbige.