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Erin Haney. *Photography and Africa.* London: Reaktion Books, 2010. 197 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-86189-382-6.

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From "Fair Ones" to "Fancy Prints:" A Thematic Approach to African Photography

Photography and Africa touches on all parts of the continent and covers work dating from the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first; however, its author, Erin Haney, cautions readers that the book is neither a survey nor a comprehensive history of the subject. Like other volumes in Reaktion Books' Exposures series, it takes a thematic approach, highlighting certain ideas (such as photographic manipulations and the mobility of photographers) and genres (such as travel, mission, and court photography) and bypassing or merely touching on others (such as Europe's demand for exotica and Hollywood's influence on African photography).

Haney begins her introduction with an overview of the complexities involved in studying the history of photography in Africa. These include familiar questions about what constitutes "Africa" and "Africanness" that must be addressed in any publication that lays claim to the term "African." After briefly reviewing earlier studies of African photography, Haney notes that the subject remains a political one; she chooses to be widely inclusive by considering works "made primarily, but not exclusively by people who were born or lived on the continent, its visitors, and those of its diaspora" (p. 10).

The chapters that follow take the form of independent, thematic essays, though several subthemes, such as the politics of representation, thread throughout the book. The first and last chapters act as bookends by focusing on early and recent photography from the continent. Between them, Haney talks about portraiture, colonial and activist photography, and the nexus between photography, printing, and painting. She cautions readers that she intends her reflections on these topics to serve "as invitations for further thinking about materiality, the process and experiences of photography, rather than completed and tidily composed discussions" (p. 11).

In the first chapter, "Towards a Wider History," Haney acknowledges that exploration, missionary activity, and other developments affected photography throughout Africa, that photographers working there recorded a wide range of subjects, and that images from all parts of the continent circulated widely; however, she chooses to emphasize how differing histories account for regional variations in the development of photographic practices and teases out themes for each of the four regions she defines. For example, she contrasts North Africa, where photography–particularly in Egypt–has roots in European romanticism and scholarly inquiry, with West Africa, where indigenous elites supported portrait studios, and Southern Africa, where European photographers catered largely to early European settlers. She highlights contributions made by European and Near Eastern photographers in North Africa, by repatriated slaves, émigrés, and African-born photographers in West Africa, and by French, English, and Indian photographers in East Africa. She pays particular attention to expeditionary and anthropological photography and their ties to colonial expansion in Central and Southern Africa, and to missionary and court photography in East Africa and the Horn.

Haney didn't aspire to write a definitive history of the early period of African photography; considering the still-developing state of research in this area, a survey would be premature. She layers her thematic, regional approach with interesting, provocative, and sometimes quirky comments: for instance, she observes that explor-

ers used cameras to "cement" their claim to African topography (p. 37). In keeping with her goal of inviting further thinking, she prefers to complicate rather than oversimplify issues, as, for example, when she observes that images taken to compile an encyclopedic classification of human races or assert political authority over supposed inferiors can be "fascinatingly multivalent" (p. 39).

Haney begins each chapter with a quote, and, no doubt, culled the gem she chose for "Portraits in the World" from her extensive study of Ghanaian photography. Published in 1863, it comments on the way that "would-be artists" had misrepresented African women (p. 57). The chapter covers portraits produced in all of the regions mentioned above and illustrates examples that range in date from 1869 to 2000. Here Haney emphasizes the collaborative nature of the genre, the mobility of images and image-makers, and the shifts in meaning that occur when images become detached from their original contexts.

In a section titled " 'Fair Ones,' " Haney discusses debut portraiture, which eventually became integral to female coming-of-age rites, a modernist practice; she might add that it appeared only among affluent families living in comparatively modernized centers. She begins the following section, "Curious Portraits," by commenting on *cartes de visite*, which served as a form of social currency for prosperous individuals, and postcards, which created visions of an imaginary Africa for faraway audiences, then deals with various aspects of royal portraiture under the heading "Majestic Prerogative." In "Latter-Day Modernists," Haney nods to the obvious by discussing an example by the Malian superstar Seydou Këita before turning to mid-century portraits taken by an anonymous studio photographer who worked in Senegal and Van-Leo (who moved to Cairo from Turkey). The final example, a self-portrait by Samuel Fosso (from the Central African Republic), reveals the creative possibilities of the genre and entices readers to look at other examples of the artist's work. "Contesting the Surface," which concludes the chapter, addresses the ways photographers alter images in order to improve them formally and/or to convey particular concepts. Here, Haney points to the use of fantastic backgrounds, theatrical poses, repetition, and layering, noting that "aesthetic play on the photographic surface" sometimes becomes "an end unto itself" (p. 86). The results, as seen in the examples she illustrates, can be both amusing and moving, and often convey a sense of creative whimsy and/or personal narrative.

Haney offers many insights into African portraiture, but some of her comments call for further information. She mentions the emergence of new modes of portraiture to suit local conventions, but fails to address how these modes evolved, how local conventions contrast with non-local ones, and how photographic portraits might relate to African portraits in other media. Although she adeptly discusses the style and iconography of debut photographs, she doesn't consider how they relate to particular cultural contexts nor does she fully explore their appeal to overseas audiences. Though intriguing, her offhand comments sometimes beg for amplification, as when she suggests, rather mysteriously, that the more we look at Këita's work in the context of other portraits, "the more we wonder and the less we can be sure we know" (p. 79). On the other hand, Haney shows a sophisticated understanding of the issues and debates that have emerged in the field; for example, she argues that portraits go beyond simplistic dualities like colonial and local and "merit attention beyond representing 'Africa', because they evoke the faces and creative traditions of the past" (pp. 68-69).

The third chapter, " 'Observers are Worried ... '," examines images created to advance or subvert politically motivated agendas. These include photos and postcards aimed at establishing taxonomies of Africans. Instead of trying to cover all of Africa, Haney strategically juxtaposes the Congo Free State, where some photographers supported imperial objectives and others exposed abuses committed by colonial authorities, against South Africa, where photography played a prominent role in countering institutionalized racism.

In a section titled "Visual Force," Haney contrasts Central African postcards that document the practice of forced labor with portraits of soldiers that exemplify colonial progress, order, and discipline. The following section, "Incorruptible Witness," investigates photography's role in exposing abuses in the Congo Free State and inflaming international protests. Avoiding oversimplification once again, Haney points to the persistence of visual tropes of peaceful scenery and untouched natives in images that activists used to counter official propaganda, and observes that they sometimes sent incomplete and mixed messages.

After touching on the emergence of photography in South Africa, Haney limits discussion to the resistance movement, which, she notes, produced some of the world's most notable photographers. She presents mid-century "activist pioneers" like Peter Magubane and Earnest Cole as intrepid and heroic figures who risked

and frequently suffered exile and imprisonment. "Shifting Approaches" focuses on the work of documentary photographers, like David Goldblatt, who produced work that countered apartheid, and a younger generation of activists, including members of the Afrapix collective, which launched campaigns to teach photography to blacks throughout the county.

Haney's research in Ghana, which may be familiar to readers from previous publications and papers, clearly inspired the fourth chapter, which deals with the intersections between painting, printing, and photography.[1] The idea that a photo's iconicity can be transferred to other media links together an odd assortment of subtopics: colonial period portraiture in the Merina kingdom of Madagascar; West Africa's first portrait painter, Aina Onabulu; honorary photographs in the Gold Coast; iconic Senegalese glass paintings; fancy prints and commemorative cloth; commemorative arts; and post-photographic painting traditions. Topics like the emergence of new modes of photography and the relationship between photographs and other media certainly merit attention, but some of the examples Haney discusses seem rather obvious, and others obscure or even tangential to the history of photography: a comment about Chêri Samba, whose subjects sometimes appear to be "awkwardly frozen as if caught in the camera's flash" (p. 149), seems random without an illustration, and why does Ainu Onabolu merit a section when none of his portraits are illustrated? Most of the subtopics involve portraiture and could be considered in tandem with the chapter devoted to that subject. If a photo showing Yoruba funerary masks belongs in the chapter on portraits, why not include the section on commemorative arts there as well? Nevertheless, there are some gems in this chapter, including the sections on Gold Coast images and printed textiles.

Haney titles the final chapter "Intimate Views," because she regards recent work by photographers from Africa and its diaspora as "provocative deliveries of unapologetically intimate views," in which the "burden" of interpretation is shifted to viewers (p. 152). Surprisingly, the term "intimate" encompasses views of a mine dump and an oil platform, as well as more expected subjects like family groups and domestic interiors. Subsections include "Disturbance" (which picks up the thread of political activism), "Homes" (which includes landscapes), "Manipulations" (which covers conceptual and formal explorations through digital media), "Close Up" (which focuses on the work of Samuel Mofokeng and Zaynab Toyosi Odunsi), and "Exhibitions beyond Africa." Although Haney's treatment of this important topic is both well informed and insightful, the lack of illustrations for many of the photographers she covers makes it difficult to follow her argument. In the section on manipulations, for example, she discusses four photographers and names several others, but illustrates only one work, a digital print by Herandane Dicko.

Although it seems most acute in the final chapter, the failure to illustrate work affects the book from beginning to end; readers must rely on verbal descriptions even for examples Haney discusses in some detail. This poses less of a problem in sections concerned largely with social history, like the one on mid-century South African photography, than in others that deal with imagery, formal characteristics, or expressive qualities. Surprisingly, Haney does not devote much attention to some of the works she actually illustrates, or even refer to them in the text. (Examples include ethnographic images used to justify the takeover of the Congo Free State, a St Baffour Studio painting of a former president of Ghana, and a digital print of Lagos by a photographer mentioned earlier in the fifth chapter, but without reference to the print.) The limits that publishers set for illustrations can be frustrating, but in this case, 101 images–including roughly 30 full-page reproductions–seems generous for a text that runs only 170 pages. Despite her thematic approach, Haney seems to struggle against an urge to write a survey, which impels her to pack her text with example after example. Roy Sieber advised students to organize their papers and oral presentations by selecting the images they would discuss: a more in-depth consideration of the illustrated works would help readers follow Haney's text.

Haney's choices of work to illustrate was also surprising: she forgoes one of François-Edmond Fortier's famous postcards in favor of less obvious examples, like an 1880 lithograph by a prolific but lesser known artist named Louis Antoine Roussin (or Antoine Louis Roussin), who drew on photographs, including his own. However, the work she has selected to illustrate demonstrates the remarkable breadth of photography that Africa has produced; it varies from the historically significant to the amusingly eccentric, and from the strikingly beautiful to the deeply disturbing, as seen in a haunting image identified as "Nsala of Wala with severed hand and foot of his five-year-old daughter murdered by ABIR militia," taken by Alice Harris in 1904 (p. 100). Haney also effectively juxtaposes images, such as a photo of a white South African at a shooting range with one of a black domestic worker, whose employer lingers over breakfast in the background.

Reaktion touts the Exposures series as insightful, intriguing, engaging, and accessible, and Haney unquestionably meets that standard. In addition to her own extensive field and archival research, she draws on the work of numerous other scholars, whose contributions she meticulously acknowledges. Extensive footnotes–up to seventy-four for a single chapter–offer a wealth of further information and sources, and the selected bibliography includes enough entries to serve as an excellent resource for those who want to do further reading. Readers will benefit not only from Haney's vast knowledge of the subject, but from her sophisticated knowledge of the issues it involves. She moves the discussion beyond simplistic concepts, like European/African binaries and a monolithic European gaze, and invites us to reexamine preconceived ideas. On the other hand, the book suffers from the insularity that seems endemic to its ilk: aside from dealing with the global context in the final chapter, Haney makes little or no mention of how similar stories play out in other parts of the world. Of course, doing so in the allotted space would prove difficult, at best.

A summary of the book's contents cannot do it justice: Haney has a talent for writing, with an enviably wide vocabulary and a style that makes even the most descriptive text interesting. The ponderings, musings, and asides she tucks into her commentary take readers on unexpected, but interesting side trips. She peppers her text with thoughtful observations, finding, for example, "something unsettling and disturbing in the disconnections, reiterations and imaginings that surround portraits of those once-known and privately remembered" (p. 38). This reviewer (who has managed to avoid the term "nuanced," which appears to be *de rigueur* in reviews nowadays) particularly enjoyed the third and fifth chapters, probably because they covered material that was the least familiar to her. Specialists and non-specialists alike will find *Photography in Africa* to be both informative and provocative.

Note

[1]. Erin Haney, "Film, Charcoal, Time: Contemporaneities in Gold Coast Photographs," *History of Photography* 34, no. 2 (2010): 119-133.

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