Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation. COSTANZA CARAFFA and TIZIANA SERENA, eds. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015. viii, 346 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-033181-3. e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-033183-7. e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-039003-2.

Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation is an international and interdisciplinary collection of 17 essays. The book emerged from a pair of conferences in 2011 in New York and Florence that scrutinized "photo archives as containers of national narratives and photographs as purveyors of national 'truths.'"[1] Each essay is a national case study from Europe, North America, Africa, or Asia, ranging temporally from the mid-19th century – when nation-states around the world emerged, photography materialized, and modern archival science appeared – through to and including the "dematerializing" and "deterritorializing" digital and virtual archives of the decolonizing and globalizing early 21st century. This volume is a successor to *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, a collection of essays from a set of conferences in 2009 that examined photographs through the lens of art historical practices in which the photograph itself disappears in favour of the visual content of the image.[2] The editors are an interdisciplinary team whose complementary expertise shapes and enhances the intellectual ambitions of the new book: Caraffa heads the Phototek [Photo Library] at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut; Serena is a photography historian on faculty at the University of Florence.

The editors argue that "it is here, in the photographic archive, that the critical mass of photographic documents able to furnish a variety of representations and interpretations has been accumulated; in this way it functions strategically as a device able to influence cultural orientations" (p. 9). They point to sedimentary layers of photographs and meanings that accumulate over decades while geopolitical territories change. These layers attest to the temporality of "truth" in the verisimilar photographic image, the ever-increasing, unprecedented quantities of photographic imagery, and the impact and opportunities of new forms of spontaneous or transitory archives made possible by digital technology. In short, "the establishment (sometimes the institutionalization) of photographic archives, their evolution and transformation, and their neglect or their rediscovery, in relation to the ways in which they are exploited for nationalistic purposes, or for purposes of creating

1 Scott Palmer, "Photo Archives IV: The Photographic Archive and the Idea of Nation," *Visual Resources* 28, no. 3 (September 2012): 277–82. Palmer reviews the October 2011 Florence conference.

2 Costanza Caraffa, ed., *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011). Theresa Rowat reviews this volume in *Archivaria* 75 (Spring 2013): 229–31.

national identity or collective memory," is the issue driving the collection (p. 9–10). Instrumental in the shift in emphasis are conference interlocutors Joan M. Schwartz and Elizabeth Edwards, whose essays bookend the collection. These scholars, who arrive at the study of photographs and archives from the perspectives of geography and anthropology respectively, argue for understanding and scrutinizing the photograph as a discrete physical object in itself, with specific social and archival histories of circulation, function, and meaning.

Schwartz opens the collection and heralds its parameters of inquiry with a question: How, when the Dominion of Canada was founded in 1867, did a sparse population from disparate British colonies scattered across the northern half of the continent come to imagine their new nation? She explores the intersection of photographs, photo archives, and imagining nationhood, finding "fertile empirical ground" in Canada that enables an inquiry of such breadth. "Canada's transformation from outpost of empire to transcontinental nation was not simply a matter of parliamentary reform and railways building" (p. 19). Schwartz argues that photographs "played an active and important role in that transformation" (p. 19). Photographic archives, as both "active producers and powerful products" of ideas of nation, along with photographs themselves, create "a visual coherence to generate a sense of belonging to a community and to foster the idea of nation" (p. 20). Along the way, Schwartz argues for methods that include a critical, materially grounded study of "context" in the originating purpose, use, and function of the photograph. Subsequent essays build on the foundation of this central notion. The case studies that follow are thick with context, critical analyses of how the photos have been used, and archives formed or deployed to invent compelling national narratives or persuasive collective memories.

The case studies in the first section, "Photo Archives, Identity, Heritage," are those of new and emerging nations that are creating histories to tell to and about themselves, as Roberto Mancini writes about Albania, where history and myth mix in the creation of a collective memory. Martha A. Sandweiss makes a compelling case for the dynamic role of government archives and survey photographs, accompanied by text, in creating "a selective memory of the past" (p. 49) that spoke also to the future by helping Americans imagine the West as part of their nation's manifest destiny. In contrast, Justin Carville examines the role of photography in societies such as Northern Ireland that have experienced "a rupture in connections with the past" and are seeking to "take possession" of a history at risk "of being subsumed into the romantic culture nationalism in the south" (p. 74). Ewa Manikowska argues that in Poland at the close of the First World War, survey photographs were mobilized to define a new nation by means of creating "authoritative and official visions of a national heritage" (p. 78). This strategy was not unlike those of three ambitious late-19th-century photographers in Dalmatia who aspired to create

photographic albums of local monuments in an attempt, Joško Belamarić argues, to define their Hapsburg province's cultural identity for "the Viennese metropolis and Europe as a whole" (p. 98).

Approaching the question from a different direction, Bernhard Jussen takes on the discipline of history. He observes that both image and text serve historical scholarship and argues that historians' collective use of "pictorial reservoirs" amassed in institutions must be subjected to the same rigorous methodological scrutiny as textual resources. Rolf Sachsse studies a historically obscured paper presented by Lucy Moholy to a UNESCO commission soon after the Second World War. In it Moholy argues for the development, standardization, and distribution of textual resources by media, particularly microfilm. Sachsse's essay raises questions and draws an important thread through the volume that highlights the ever-changing media that "photography" encompasses and through which it is generated, organized, and disseminated. In a similar vein, Tiziana Serena presents a compelling conclusion to this section of the book. She conceives of the photographic archive as a "specific memory 'apparatus'" (p. 182), not necessarily a physical entity. It is a container of "narrative possibilities" for social classes who found in photography an "irresistible ally" in articulating their idea of a nation unified as Italy (p. 180).

In the second section, three essayists explore "Photo Archives, Revolution, National Heroes." Isotta Poggi identifies connections between the visual narratives constructed in the photographic albums made by Stefano Lecchi as a "photographic campaign" in support of Roman citizens' nationalist and republican ambitions. The albums document damage sustained by buildings and monuments during France's deadly siege of Rome in 1849. In contrast, Martina Baleva examines the construction and "de-archiving" of an emblematic figure of nationalism in Bulgaria, and John Mraz tests portraits of iconic revolutionary heroes in the Casasola archives, which the Mexican state mobilized to construct a post-revolutionary identity. Both authors challenge received wisdom. Baleva musters historical evidence against an assumed attribution, arguing that responsibility for misattribution rests with a lack of scholarly work to establish and support archival acceptance and usage. Mraz shows how delving into historical detail makes nuance, layering, and complexity in the photo archive far more interesting and illuminating; in the process, he also establishes errors of attribution for a famous Zapata portrait. These scholars demonstrate what in my experience is a common and critical flaw in researchers' use of photo archives: that both unquestioned acceptance of archival attribution and a surface reading of photographic portraits, their production and reception, are rampant practices and the cause of misleading theses and erroneous conclusions among scholars across disciplines.

Holly Edwards' essay, thick with context, insightful reading, and balanced assessment, opens the last section, "Photo Archives as Construction," which looks at use and reuse of photo images and archives in the late 20th and early

21st centuries. The essays in this grouping represent how and why humanities and social studies scholarship in general, as well as informed engagement with photographs and the archives in which they are gathered, organized, and mobilized, are critical to the ongoing aspirations of a just society and informed citizenry but have retreated, or been elbowed, to the margins of public discourse. In "'You need not take a camel …': The Archive of the Afghan Tourist Organization," Edwards explores "the aesthetics and agency of tourist publications in the spaces between nations, with reference to both content and intent" (p. 268), tracing shifts in canons of "visual propriety and gender norms" (p. 276). One example is a brief comparison of photos deployed in a 21st-century Afghan tourist website and those in 1970s brochures and calendars. "Time, heritage, institutional aesthetics and the processes of globalization" (p. 277) are among the areas into which a photographic archives offers insight, in Edwards' estimation.

Patricia Hayes looks at issues of "inserting" into today's "postcolonial neoliberal times" photo portraits that were made by John Liebenberg in 1980s Namibia, during a period in that country's long war for independence, but which were not seen publicly until 2011. Hayes considers how this disrupts the "usual histories of both nation and photography" (p. 282). The volume comes full circle with Lucie Ryzova's "Nostalgia for the Modern: Archive Fever in Egypt in the Age of Post-Photography." In the shift of photographs from physical to virtual materiality, Ryzova argues that the "essential photographic quality [of] indexicality," produced by light and reflection of an object through mechanical means, is retained, while its digital or virtual capacity has been embraced as a "bonus" (p. 303). Her case study examines how citizens mobilized vintage orientalist photographs of historic monuments on social media following the 2009 and 2011 Egyptian revolutions, creating a "bottom-up archive" to comment on present-day Egypt.

Questioning whether and how photographs make national "histories seem strong" (p. 321), Elizabeth Edwards, in her afterword, weaves a summary of the multivalent views, methods, theories, and consequences of the essayists' case studies. "Photographs … become part of the discourse of stability and authenticity," she observes, in part because of the perception and desire that photographs "show things as they 'really' were" (p. 322). In turn, "the archive is a key site of translation, performance and consolidation, an articulation of, and statement of, a nation as a public culture held in common, and managed to those ends" (p. 326). Archives are flexible and fluid, she argues, composed and mobilized in varying ways that signify how people and nations imagine or perceive their identities through time.

Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation succeeds in conveying the complexities, nuances, and critical relations of photographs, photo archives, and the imagining of nationhood since the mid-19th century. It will be of interest to scholars across disciplines who seek to understand the concept, evolution,

devolution, and struggles between and among communities and the idea of nation. It will be important to archivists and researchers who study archives as well as those who use photographs and archives – institutional, state, private, or otherwise – to sharpen their critical socio-political understanding of archival contexts and how photos are "embedded in other discourses," as Elizabeth Edwards contends. To that end, it is a volume that would have benefited enormously from an index that traces for readers the concepts, geopolitical sites, and historical moments spread throughout. As it stands, the index, which is limited to names alone, veils the complexity of the book and the significance of its endeavour.

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