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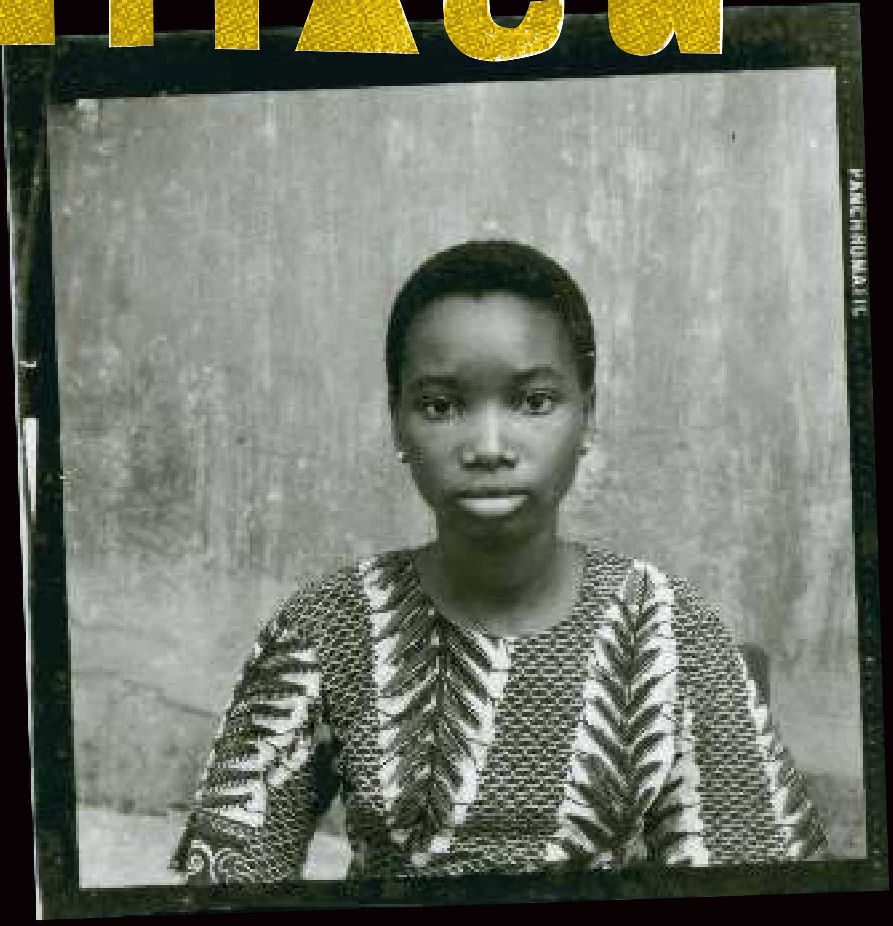
PANCHROMATIC

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION IN WEST AFRICA

**Jennifer Bajorek**

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## PHOTOGRAPHY AND DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION IN WEST AFRICA

**Jennifer Bajorek**

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Frontispiece: Portrait, woman in hitchhiker pose. Photograph: Zinsou Cosme Dossa, Porto-Novo, Benin, ca. 1962. Modern print made by Léonce Agbodjélou with the photographer's permission. Courtesy of the family of Zinsou Cosme Dossa.

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# A NOTE ON GEOGRAPHY, SPELLING, AND LANGUAGE

## “West” versus “west”

I write “west Africa” deliberately without a capital “W” in order to refer to places and people in the westernmost and, in the case of my research, largely coastal part of the continent south of the Sahara. In so doing, my intention is to mark a distinction between this region and the French colonial administrative entity, l’Afrique Occidentale Française, or the AOF, a federation of eight French-controlled territories, including Senegal and Benin (then Dahomey), that existed from 1895 to 1960. When referring explicitly to the colonial administrative entity (which is sometimes translated into English as “French West Africa”) or to its territories as a group during the colonial period, I use the term “the AOF” (or, occasionally, in the post-independence period, “ex-AOF,” when referring specifically to the afterlife of the colonial administrative entity). In all other cases, I use “west Africa.”

## Why Senegal and Benin?

Senegal and Benin are geographically as well as culturally distinct. The two countries do not share any major language or ethnic groups. In the colonial period, their capital cities and largest urban centers, Saint-Louis and Porto-Novo, respectively, were effectively the northernmost and southernmost outposts of the French colonial territories of the AOF. Their contemporary capitals, Dakar and Cotonou (technically, Porto-Novo is Benin’s capital, but Cotonou is the de facto seat of government), are two thousand miles apart. My research has focused on photographers and collections in these two countries for reasons that were, at first, largely connected with my contact networks. I started my research in Senegal, where I had been introduced by friends to important photography collections and contacts. While in Senegal, I was told by a museum director in Saint-Louis (Fatima Fall, director of the Centre de Recherches et de Documentation du Sénégal) that I should go to Benin, where she introduced me to still further collections and contacts. In the course of my research, I learned that there are deeper links between these countries as privileged sites for research on photography. Evidence suggests that both countries saw early and intensive photographic activity, and Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo notes that, during the colonial period, civil servants from Senegal and Dahomey were responsible for bringing photography to other parts of the AOF, and that photography was introduced in Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso) by Senegalese and Dahomean functionaries.[1] Other factors mark both Senegal and Benin as privileged sites for contemporary research, and I underscore these at relevant junctures in the book.

### French and African Spellings

I use French rather than English orthography for a handful of proper names: for example, "French Soudan" (present-day Mali) and the names of political parties ("Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais"). I have done so in order to preserve these names in a form that is consistent with the existing scholarship in both French and English and more likely to be recognizable to my Francophone African interlocutors. In Benin, it is not uncommon for individuals with Yoruba names to write them using Yoruba (rather than French) orthography, and when someone told me that an individual or a branch of a family preferred a Yoruba spelling, I have used it. Note that there is often variation within a single branch of a family in the spelling of a photographer's surname (for example, Kassé rather than Casset). When I came across such variations, I preserved them and made them explicit for the reader.

### Language

All of the interviews I did in west Africa that I cite or reference in this book were conducted in French, as I unfortunately do not speak any African languages. However, the reader should keep in mind that urban west Africa is a radically polyglot space, where almost any conversation, if it goes on long enough, is destined to take place in multiple languages. During interviews, which were semistructured yet often took place under highly unpredictable conditions, it was not uncommon for people other than my intended "interviewee" to be present, or to come and go over the course of the interview, participating spontaneously or by invitation and interjecting their views in our conversations. This multiplicity of competing voices and views was not infrequently expressed in one or more African languages (in Senegal, usually Wolof or Pulaar; in Benin, usually Gun or Fon), or in a hybrid of French and one of these other languages, before being translated for my benefit. Note also that in both Senegal and Benin many older people, particularly women, understand French but cannot speak it. In my conversation with Ndèye Teinde Dieng in Saint-Louis, for example, I spoke French and she spoke Wolof, with her son translating the latter into French for me.

# PREFACE

The seed of this book was planted in 1999, when I saw some portraits by the photographer Seydou Keïta in an art gallery in Paris. I was struck both by the images and by the discourse that surrounded them. One critic had ventured, of Keïta's photographs, which were taken in Bamako (formerly the capital of French Soudan and today the capital of Mali) in the 1940s and 1950s, that these were representations of people who wanted to be free or who were "on the way to being free."[1] What did it mean, I wondered, to look like you were free, or wanted to be, in a photograph? What is the relationship between freedom and photography? Is there only one relationship between them? If it mattered, as Keïta's interpreters clearly thought it mattered, that these photographs of freedom were connected in some way with the end of colonialism and the coming of African liberation, would not these questions have to be qualified or reframed?

Another two years passed before I finished and filed my doctoral dissertation, which I was writing at the time (on another topic, in a field only obliquely related to photography). Five years after that, I landed my first tenure-track job, or the equivalent in the United Kingdom, and it became possible for me to embark on substantive new research. In the meantime, this thing called "African photography" had exploded, a new field had been invented, and the research landscape was changing at a rapid clip—just how rapid I could not really grasp until I landed in Dakar, for the first time, in December 2007. Over the next decade, this landscape would continue to change, but for me these questions about photography and freedom, and, in what I was pretty sure had to be a different register, about photography and decolonization, remained the same.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For granting me permission to reproduce their photographs or for facilitating access to photography collections in west Africa, I owe special thanks to Ismaïla Camara, Ndèye Teinde Dieng, Guibril André Diop, Okwui Enwezor, Fatima Fall, Karim Abdou Fall, Gnilane Ly Faye, Ibrahima Faye, Marius Gouané, Koyo Kouoh, Julien Lopez, Aïssatou Ly, Aliou Ly, Bocar Ly, Oumar Ly, Boubacar Touré Mandémory, Tim Mangin, Khady Faye Ndoye, Abdourahmane Niang, Abdou Khadre Sarr, Bouna Medoune Seye, and El Hadj Adama Sylla in Senegal or with regard to Senegalese collections; to Benoît Adjovi, Léonce Agbodjélou, Jérome Chazody, Zinsou Félix DeMesse, Zinsou Cosme Dossa, Colette Gounou, Alphonse Labitan, Sonia Mahamé, Mathias Massodé, Baudelaire Mèhomè, Ézéchiel Mèhomè, Ida Mèhomey, Angelo Micheli, Franck Ogou, Alphonse Olibé, and Siaka Lawani in Benin; and to Michel de Breteuil in France. I am equally grateful to Hélène Neveu Kringelbach, Ibrahima Thiam, Baba Diop, and Younus Seye for sharing vital historical information and helping to identify individuals in several images; to Djibril Sy and Giulia Paoletti for their reproductions of photographs from the collection of Doudou Diop; to Léonce Agbodjélou for the prints he made for me from the negative archives of Cosme Dossa; and to Leslie Rabine for her reproductions of photographs from the Faye-Ly family collection.

Fatima Fall, Erin Haney, Franck Ogou, and Leslie Rabine were wise teachers and unflagging traveling companions from an early date. They taught me not only how to think with west African archives but also how to agitate in them, and I could never have written this book without them. For much-needed friendship during my first trip to Senegal in 2007, heartfelt thanks go to Sophie Coly and Abdou Mbodj. To those we lost along the way—Alioune Bâ, Cosme Dossa, Okwui Enwezor, Ibrahima Faye, Henrike Grohs, Oumar Ly, Abdou

Mbodj, Khady Faye Ndoye, Bouna Medoune Seye, and Bisi Silva—I am sorry that you did not live to see this book come to fruition, but I feel very lucky that your voices will always resonate through its pages.

Over the many years that it took to write this book, I had the good fortune of crossing paths with African studies scholars or Africanists working in an array of disciplines all over the world. To a fault, they gave generously of their time and were paragons of collegiality. In Berkeley, conversations with Rozy Fredericks, Donald Moore, Toby Warner, and Michael Watts helped to shape this project while it was in its infancy, and I am deeply grateful to them. Toby Warner deserves a special shout-out for suggesting that I look at *Bingo*. Others who engaged with this project, shared their own research, or challenged me in vital ways over the longer durée were Liam Buckley, Julie Crooks, Elizabeth Harney, Salah Hassan, Patricia Hayes, Patricia Hickling, Everlyn Nicodemus, Érika Nimis, Marian Nur Goni, Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, Elvira Dyangani Osé, John Peffer, and Andrea Stultiens, and I cannot thank them enough. In London, where I was living when I carried out the bulk of my research in west Africa, I was lucky enough to stumble into a community of scholars and friends who were working on African questions, or on photography, and who brought me into formative conversations or created meaningful opportunities for me to present from my research at early stages: Annie Coombes, Elizabeth Edwards, Johnny Golding, Ros Gray, Christopher Morton, Darren Newbury, John Parker, Christopher Pinney, Polly Savage, AbdouMaliq Simone, Lynn Turner, Richard Vokes, Elizabeth Williams, and David Zeitlyn. I am particularly grateful to John Parker for inviting me to present from this research for the very first time, in the African History Seminar at the School of Oriental and African Studies, in January 2008.

Back in the United States, a period of protracted institutional nomadism was made bearable by many wonderful colleagues and hosts. At Cornell, I owe thanks to Salah Hassan and Jolene Rickard, and to Tim Murray for hosting me in the Society for the Humanities; at Rutgers, I owe thanks to Ousseina Alidou, Sarah Brett-Smith, Carolyn Brown, and Barbara Cooper, and to Meredith McGill for hosting me in the Center for Cultural Analysis; at New York University, I am indebted to Shelley Rice and Deborah Willis for giving me an opportunity to teach from this and other African material to undergraduates in the Department of Photography and Imaging, and for their intellectual and moral support. In New York, I am grateful to the community at the Brooklyn Writers Space, for the mojo, and to Eduardo Cadava, Jennifer Deger, Mamadou Diouf, Sean Jacobs, Tom Keenan, Brian Larkin, Kyoo Lee, Jacques Lezra, Gilles Peress, and Brendan Wattenberg for meaningful invitations or conversations along the way. In Johannesburg, Leora Farber, Pamila Gupta, Terry Kurgan, Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, and Juan Orrantia issued invitations or initiated conversations that brought me, and this research, into one of the most dynamic centers of contemporary knowledge production in Africa, and that helped to shape the larger parameters of this book.

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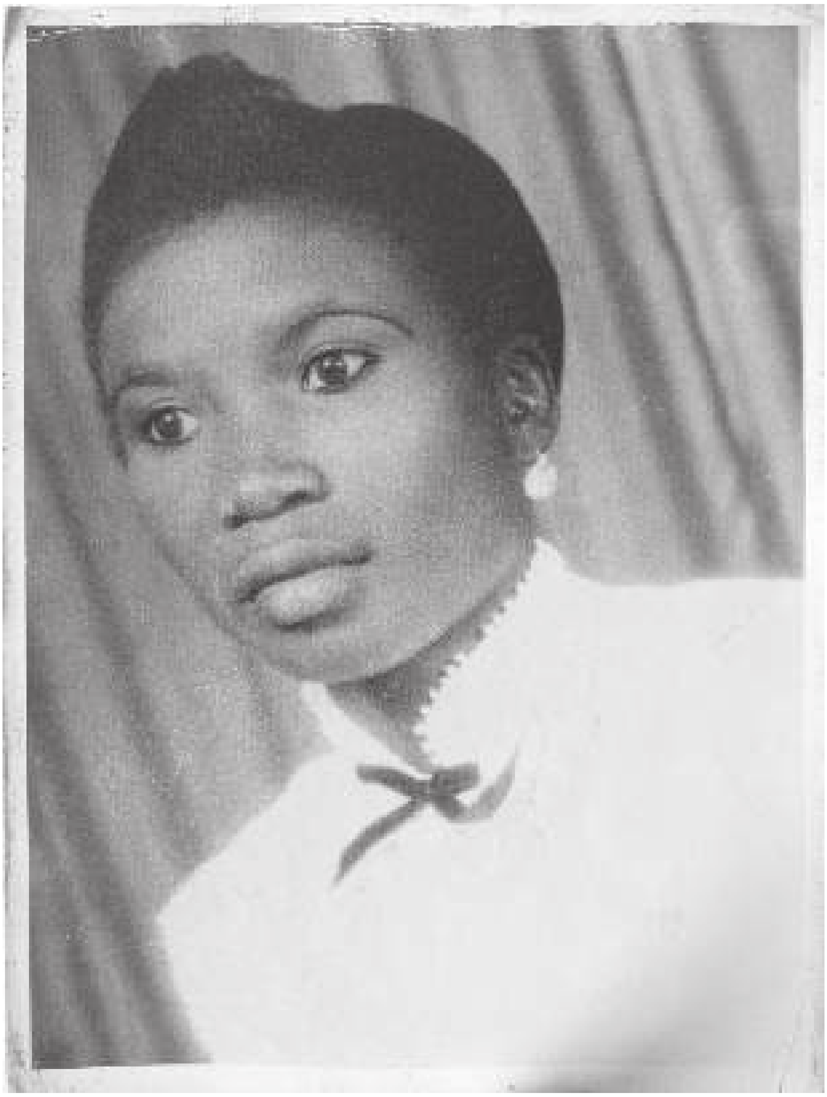
Finally, I wish to express an inexpressible debt of gratitude to my partner, Stuart Naifeh, and to our daughter, Lily, for letting me go where and when I needed to, and who, without ever suggesting I was lost, have so often shown me the way.

# At Least Two Histories of Liberation

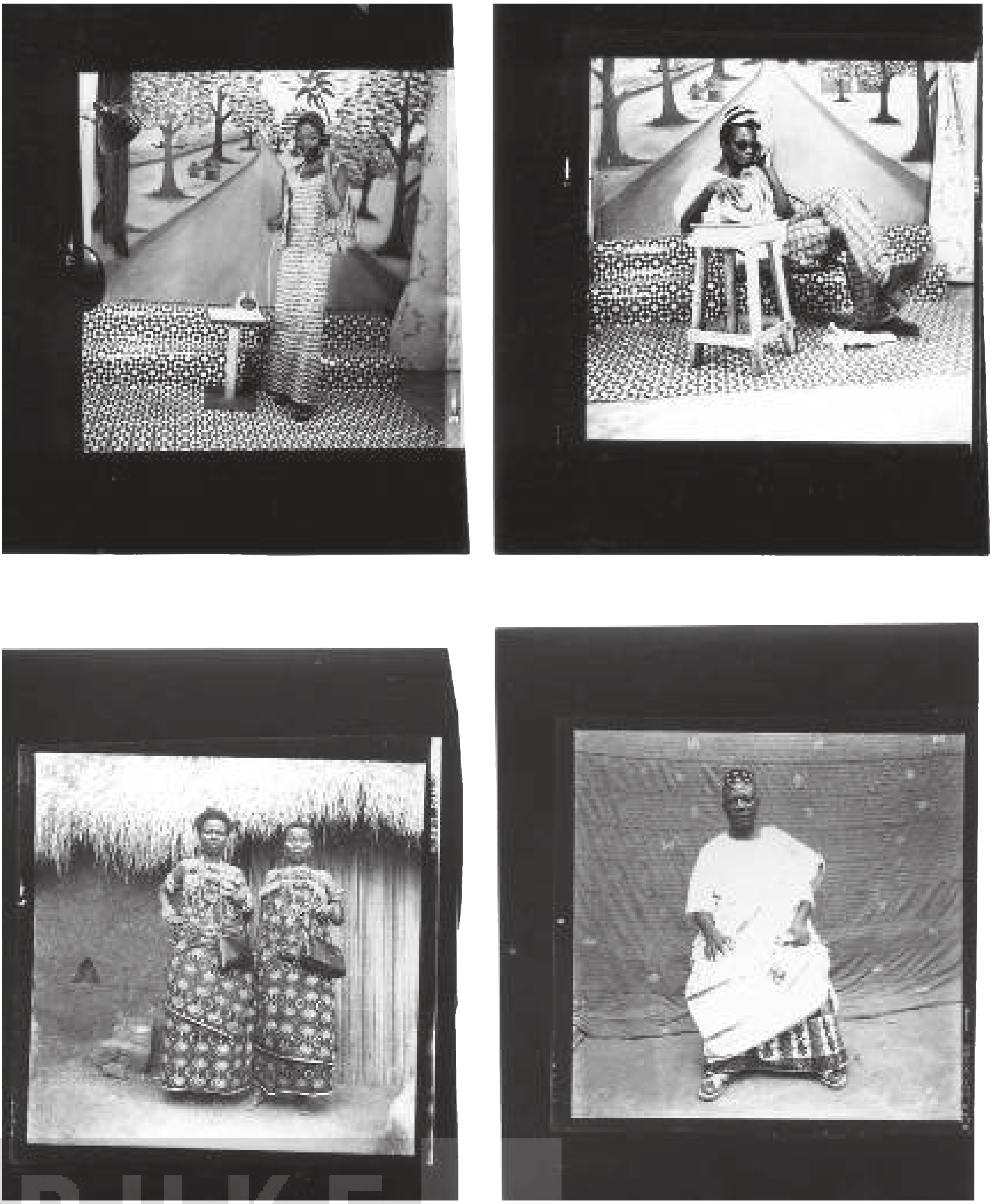
This book tells a history that has, in a sense, already been written—in photographs. With and through the images reproduced in its pages, drawn largely from the collections of west African photographers or from other midcentury archives and collections in four cities in west Africa—Dakar, Saint-Louis, Porto-Novo, and Cotonou—it explores the story of a dynamic period in the history of Francophone west Africa, extending roughly from the end of the Second World War to the first decade or so after independence from French colonial rule: 1960 for the bulk of l'Afrique Occidentale Française (the AOF). This moment coincided with the struggle for independence and decolonization not only in Senegal and Benin (formerly Dahomey), the two countries on which my research has focused, but in all of France's ex-colonial territories. Key social and political institutions were in the midst of radical change. Some of these were so-called Western institutions, the Africanization of which played an important (if sometimes still controversial) role in anticolonial struggles. This period was characterized by widening political participation of Africans in electoral and parliamentary politics, the rise of new nationalisms, and a proliferation of new, distinctly African political parties. These same years were witness to the expansion of a powerful urban labor movement, in which Africans articulated demands for equality with Europeans vis-à-vis wages and working conditions, the culmination of decades of formidable labor organizing. They were also marked by burgeoning west African awareness of, and participation in, global liberation movements. We can argue over whether these movements were successful on the terms that they set for themselves. Yet they remain a crucial legacy of anticolonial struggle, and they prompted people in west Africa to join forces with people in other parts of the world as they imagined and fought for alternatives to colonial



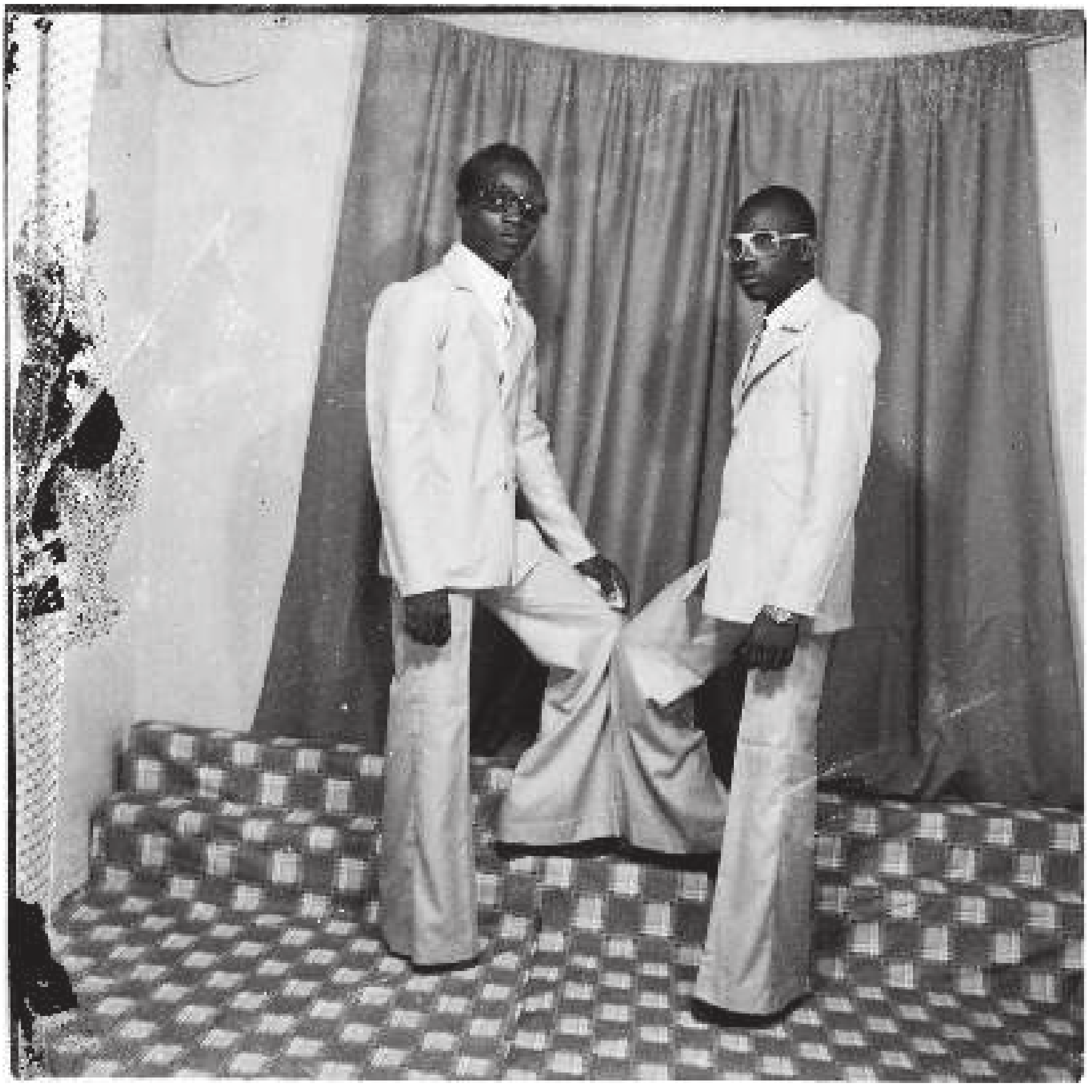
**INTRO.1** Portrait of Khady Ndoye, printed on the diagonal. Photographer unknown. Dakar, Senegal, late 1950s. Collection of Ibrahima Faye and Khady Ndoye, courtesy of Gnilane Ly Faye. Reproduction: Leslie Rabine.

forms of social and political organization, free-market capitalism, and emergent Cold War polarities.

This moment coincided with the rapid development of photography in west Africa and in the rest of the world. The practice of studio portraiture, once the exclusive province of elites, was expanding in cities like Dakar, then the capital of the AOF, just as it was expanding in New Delhi, Jakarta, Beirut, Buenos Aires, and Los Angeles. Already by the late 1940s, the possibility of sitting, and paying, for a photographic portrait had come within reach of an increasing number of people living in cities across the AOF, and, by the mid-1950s, the democratization of photography in urban west Africa was assured.



**INTRO.2** Digitized contact prints from the studio of Benoît Adjovi. Two of the photographs (top right and top left) feature the same telephone prop. Cotonou, Benin, late 1960s/early 1970s. Courtesy of Benoît Adjovi.



**INTRO.3** Double portrait, men in matching white suits and sunglasses. This photograph belongs to a larger class of "twin" image, common in West Africa, in which twin relationships, whether biological or spiritual, are evoked. Photograph: Benoît Adjovi, Cotonou, Benin, 1970s. Courtesy of Benoît Adjovi.

The first half of this book chronicles this moment and the larger processes of photography's democratization. It presents the evidence that I, and others, have amassed to support claims about the medium's popularity in Francophone west Africa in this period. The first three chapters explore the conditions and consequences of this popularity, primarily (although not exclusively) in the form of studio portraiture. In the second half of the book, I shift the frame to what I call "political photography." This is the name that was given by photographers and others I interviewed in west Africa to a certain class of documentary images, flexibly defined yet symbolically potent, which it had become possible for them to envision, and to take, on the eve of independence for the first time. Throughout the book, I argue that people living in urban west Africa used photography, whether in the guise of portraiture or of political images or still other genres, both to document a time of radical social and political change and to effect these changes.

Each chapter puts photographs from west African archives and collections associated with the independence generation into dialogue with stories shared, and knowledge produced, in interviews that I did with west African photographers, their descendants, and other collectors and keepers of photographs in order to illustrate the multitude of ways that urban west Africans were using expanded access to the medium in this moment. I argue and try to show that photographers, their subjects, and their publics used photography to express new experiences, to reshape public and political discourse, and to facilitate new conversations, relays, and exchanges—with people living right next door to them and all over the world—both on the eve of independence and in the post-independence years.

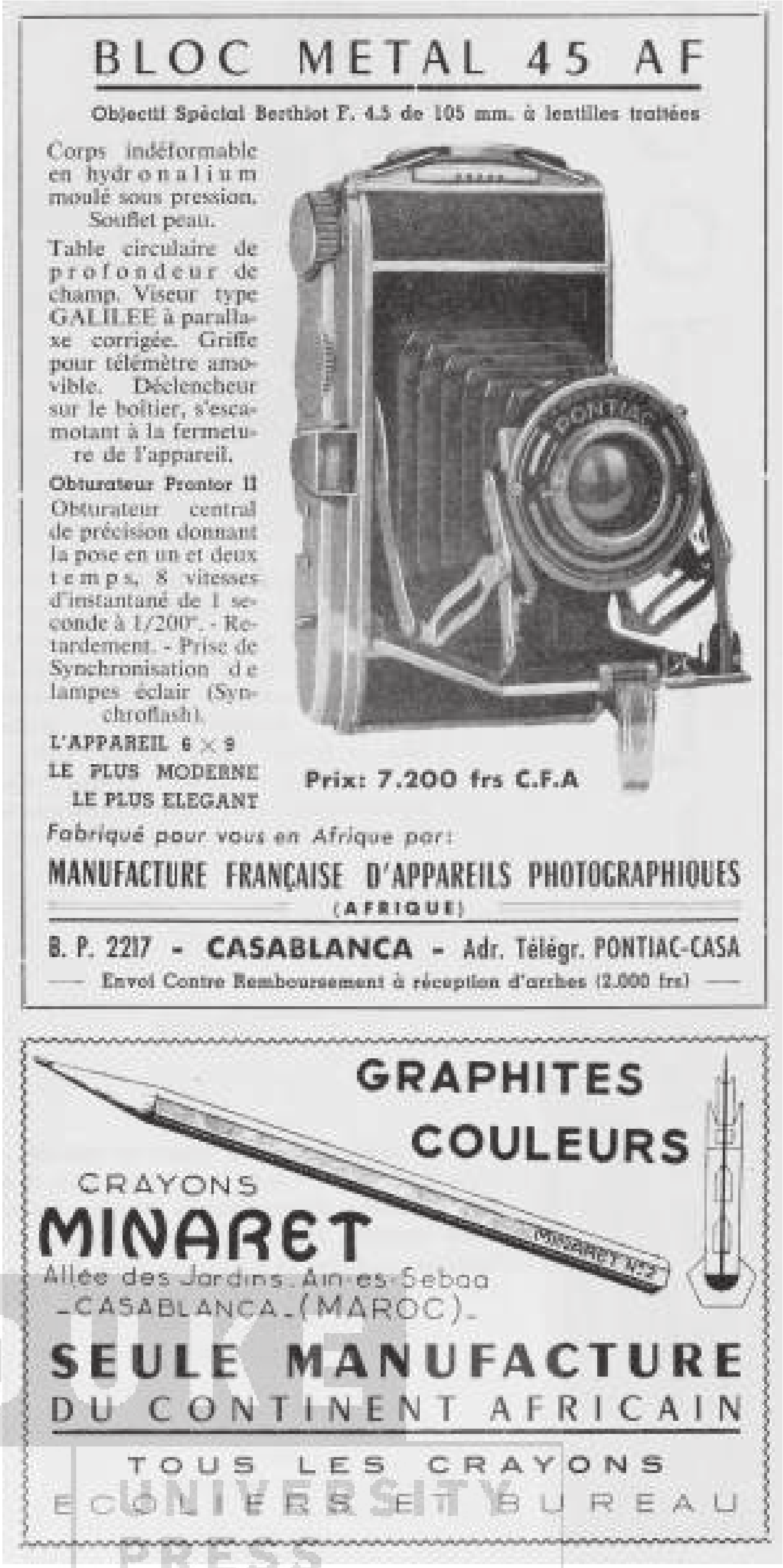
Without a doubt, cultural factors played a significant role in the democratization of photography in Francophone west Africa in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The medium had become associated, at this moment, with radios, telephones (figure Intro.2, top left and top right), and James Brown; motorcycles, moviegoing, and miniskirts; romantic love, state formation, and long-distance travel—hence the many studio portraits featuring cars and scooters, backdrops depicting jet planes, and the ubiquitous hitchhiker pose. Economic and technological factors were clearly also important and were among the topics that, I found, photographers were most eager to discuss. Between the 1930s and 1950s, cameras had become less expensive, lighter weight, and more portable, making them more affordable and easier to distribute in Africa. In the interwar period and even more so after the Second World War, a small but increasingly visible class of urban west Africans was being actively imagined as consumers, by themselves and by European and American manufacturers, who in the waning years of the colonial project were experimenting with marketing their products directly in Africa. Credit became more widely available, and photographers living in both Senegal and Benin found it possible to purchase the latest cameras on credit from the old Bordeaux-based trading houses, such as, in Saint-Louis, Maurel et Prom.

This is where Oumar Ly, a photographer from Podor, a city in the north of Senegal, whom I interviewed in Dakar in 2008, told me that he bought his first Rolleiflex on credit in the late 1960s. The twin lens reflex camera, manufactured in Germany, was beloved by photographers in Dakar, Saint-Louis, Cotonou, and Porto-Novo—as it was by photographers all over the world—

for its ultra-durable construction, ultra-reliable optics, and a generous sweet spot in its depth of field. Still other photographers took advantage of the fact that it was becoming easier to order cameras by air freight, from Paris or (better) from Casablanca, where the French camera manufacturer Pontiac relocated all of its factories in 1951 (figure Intro.4). Zinsou Cosme Dossa, a photographer I interviewed over several years in Porto-Novo, Benin, starting in 2009, told me that he decided to try his hand at photography when, in 1950, he saw an advertisement for a camera in a French mail-order catalogue. The growing importance of air freight and mail-order commerce, whether fulfilled from Paris or cities elsewhere in Africa, should not be underestimated for photographers of the independence generation, some of whom, with the advent of color, sent their films abroad for processing by mail.[1] Despite the conspicuous rise of consumerization and commercial networks linking Africans as consumers to the metropole in the 1950s, however, it is important to underscore that Dossa was not the intended recipient of the catalogue. Rather, he found it lying in a Porto-Novo street, where, on a whim, he picked it up.

In the years since our last interview in January 2013 (Dossa passed away in August of that year), I have often wondered how things might have gone had he not picked the catalogue up. By 1957, he had established a highly successful studio practice in Porto-Novo. Soon thereafter, he was hired as the first official photographer of the colonial administration of the territory of Dahomey. At that moment, when he was hired by the administration, Dossa became, as far as we know given the current research, the first African photographer in any AOF territory to have been credentialed by the French to work as an official territorial photographer (figure Intro.5).[2] After independence, he went on to become the official photographer of Hubert Maga, the first president of the newly independent Republic of Dahomey, thereby becoming the "first photographer" of the new postcolonial state.[3]

The stories of photographers, like Ly in Senegal and Dossa in Benin, who seized on these and other opportunities, already limn another history of liberation, and the photographs that they took reveal themselves to be much more than simple documents, associated only retrospectively with historical events. These images, when read against the backdrop of stories told by and about the photographers who took them, the clients who commissioned them, and the people who circulated, looked at, and engaged with them, suggest a more active and creative role played by photography in the realization of these events. In turning our attention to this other history, this book sets out to show, not simply that photography had an influence on social and political life in Francophone west Africa in this period (like all media in the hands of Africans,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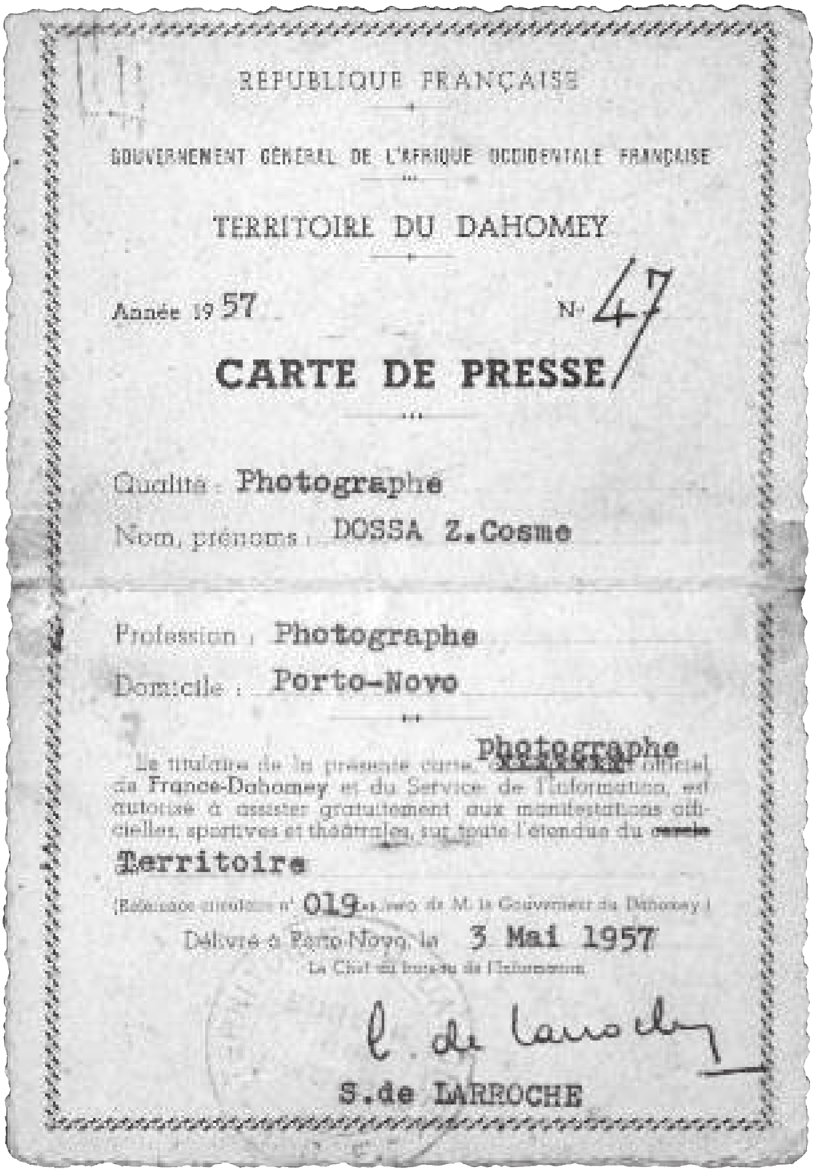
**INTRO.4** Advertisement for the Berthiot Bloc Métal camera that ran in 1953 in *Bingo*, an illustrated magazine targeting a Francophone African readership. Pontiac, the French lens manufacturer (referenced at the bottom right), moved all of its production to Casablanca in 1951. Below the camera advertisement ran an advertisement for Minaret brand pencils, also made in Morocco. Courtesy of Michel de Breteuil and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL DE L'AFRIQUE OCCIDENTALE FRANÇAISE

TERRITOIRE DU DAHOMEY

Année 1957 N° 47

**CARTE DE PRESSE**

Qualité : **Photographe**

Nom, prénoms : **DOSSA Z.Cosme**

Profession : **Photographe**

Domicile : **Porto-Novo**

Le titulaire de la présente carte, **Photographe** officiel de France-Dahomey et du Service de l'Information, est autorisé à assister gratuitement aux manifestations officielles, sportives et théâtrales, sur toute l'étendue du **Territoire**

(Référence circulaire n° **019** [illegible] de M. le Gouverneur du Dahomey)

Délivré à Porto-Novo, le **3 Mai 1957**

Le Chef du bureau de l'Information

S. de Larroche

**S.de LARROCHE**

**INTRO.5** Press pass of photographer Zinsou Cosme Dossa, credentialing him as an official photographer of the territory of Dahomey. Courtesy of the family of Zinsou Cosme Dossa.

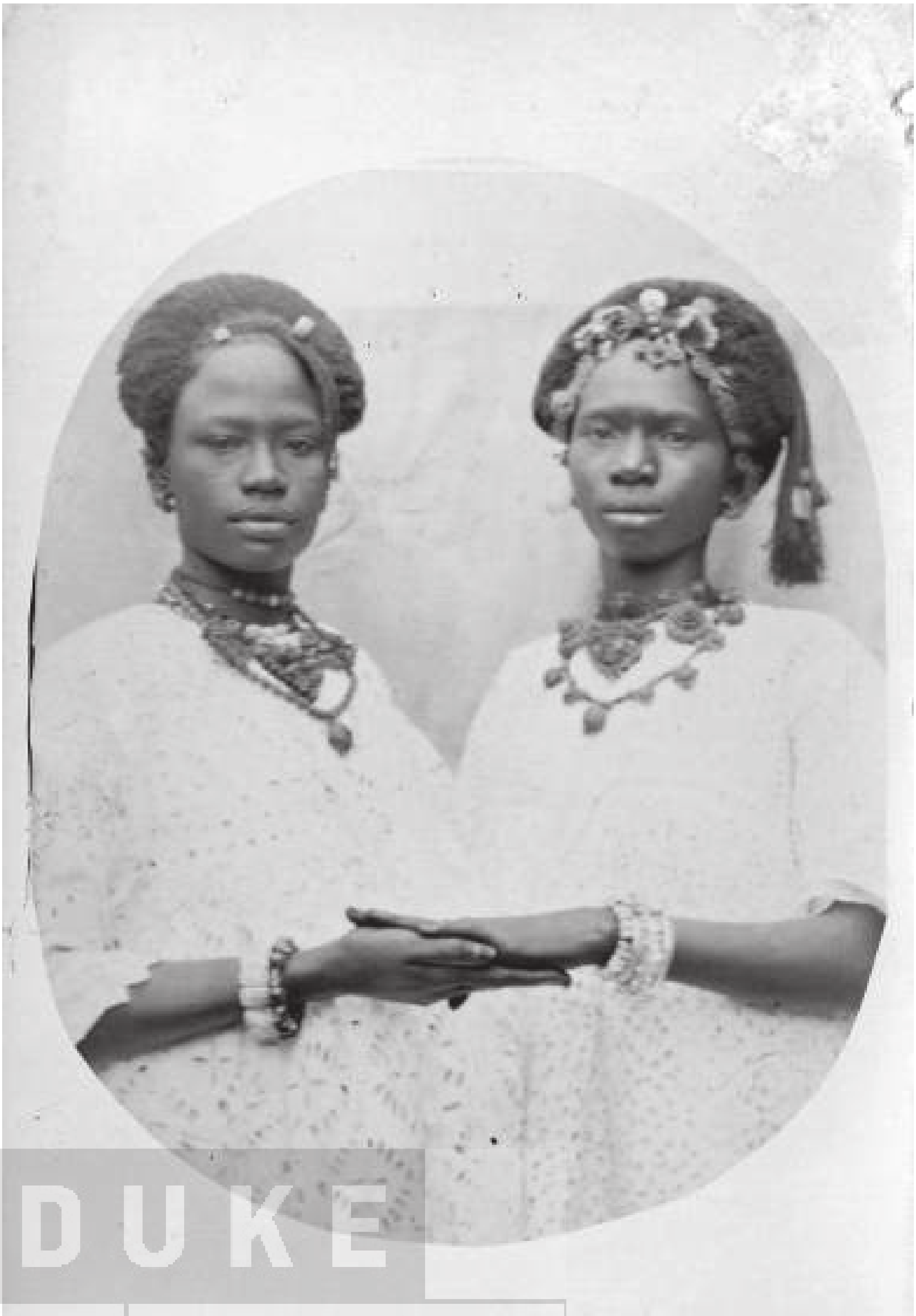
it clearly did), but that it enabled photographers, their subjects, and their publics to respond to the social and political changes that they were experiencing in novel ways. Ultimately, I argue that urban west Africans' embrace of photography was a key factor in expanding the existing spaces of political imagination, and I set out to show that, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, west Africans took full advantage of this expanded imaginative field. They used photography to open new routes and relays of communication; they creatively exploited its infinite capacities for recirculation and resignification; and they used its remarkable plasticity, lack of fixity, and aesthetic and referential open-endedness to reimagine, and remake, their world.

## From Early Days to Kodak Swag

The early history of photography in Africa has been treated elsewhere and will not be the subject of this book, yet it should be stressed for those who may not be familiar with this history that photography's "arrival" in Africa was in no way belated. The first daguerreotypes made on the African continent were made in Alexandria in November 1839, by the French Romantic painter Horace Vernet and his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, during their famous *voyage en Orient*.[4] The Frenchmen arrived in Egypt scarcely two months after Arago's announcement of Daguerre's invention in Paris. On the second day of Vernet's and Goupil-Fesquet's visit, the Ottoman Khedive Mehmet of Alexandria borrowed the Frenchmen's daguerreotype machine and made his own daguerreotypes.

This episode is cited frequently in the historical literature, and scholars have interpreted the Khedive's use of the Frenchmen's daguerreotype machine in various ways, including as the first appropriation of a camera from a European by a person living in Africa.[5] Whether or not we accept this interpretation—the Khedive was, by almost any definition, not African (his presence in Alexandria was connected with an imperial project with which the French were entering into competition)—this episode places the first story that we have about photography in Africa under the star of an irrepressible desire for self-imaging and underscores, simultaneously, the essential appropriability of the photographic apparatus. The episode thus stands as a corrective to the now firmly entrenched and often erroneous assumption that photography in Africa was always an instrument of colonial violence, and that the history of photography on the African continent is therefore the history of a monolithic colonial gaze.[6]

Erin Haney reports that the first daguerreotypes made by an *African-born* photographer of which we have a record were made in 1840 by an Afro-Dutch merchant in Gold Coast (present-day Ghana).[7] The first commercial portraits



(also daguerreotypes) to have been produced in Africa were also produced in Gold Coast, at Elmina, in 1841, as Haney has also shown.[8] These dates are significant, for they testify to the existence of local markets for portraiture in cities in coastal west Africa, where local photographers engaged in commercial practice serving local clients and patrons from the medium's early days.[9] Without delay, Africans incorporated photography into existing image-making practices and social and religious rituals, transforming them aesthetically—and in other ways. My own research is concerned principally with photography's incorporation into the sphere of political imagination in the middle of the twentieth century, on the premise that this, too, is a critical part of the medium's "local" histories. These histories, I argue, offer us broader insights into dimensions of photographic and decolonial imagination that have often been overlooked or occluded by dominant histories of the medium, which have been framed, almost invariably until recently, from a Euro-American vantage point.

By the time that Pontiac moved its factories to Morocco, in 1951, the consumer market for film, lenses, enlargers, papers, developers, and other photographic supplies was rapidly expanding in French colonial territories in Africa. Attesting to the success in this period of consumer marketing targeting Africans, all of the photographers in Senegal and Benin whom I interviewed or whose families I interviewed for this book exhibited staunch brand loyalty and a keen awareness of the minutiae of particular product lines. In 2007, in a conversation that I had with Guibril André Diop, the son of Saint-Louis photographer Mouhamadou (Doudou) Diop, I learned that France Photo, his father's supplier in Neuilly-sur-Seine (a suburb of Paris), specialized in Kodak films and papers.[10] André proudly described his father to me as "le numéro un de Kodak" (Kodak's number one customer) in the region. The family has the invoices, order forms, and customs declarations to prove it, and, in the living room of their Saint-Louis home, Diop's family still displays a shiny *pagivolt*, a kind of revolving electric picture frame. The frame, André explained, was given to his father by France Photo in recognition of his loyalty to Kodak. Never mind that it ceased to work many years ago. The frame is a testament to his father's strong ties to his metropolitan supplier, and the crowning glory of Kodak swag.[11]

In not one but two interviews that I did—one in Senegal, the other nearly two thousand miles away in Benin—photographers or their descendants described to me in detail the impact of the 1964 merger of Agfa AG (then owned by Bayer) with Gevaert on the availability of west Africans' favorite films and papers. Despite Diop's much-vaunted loyalty to Kodak, his son André was quick to spell out the impact of this merger on the availability of particular

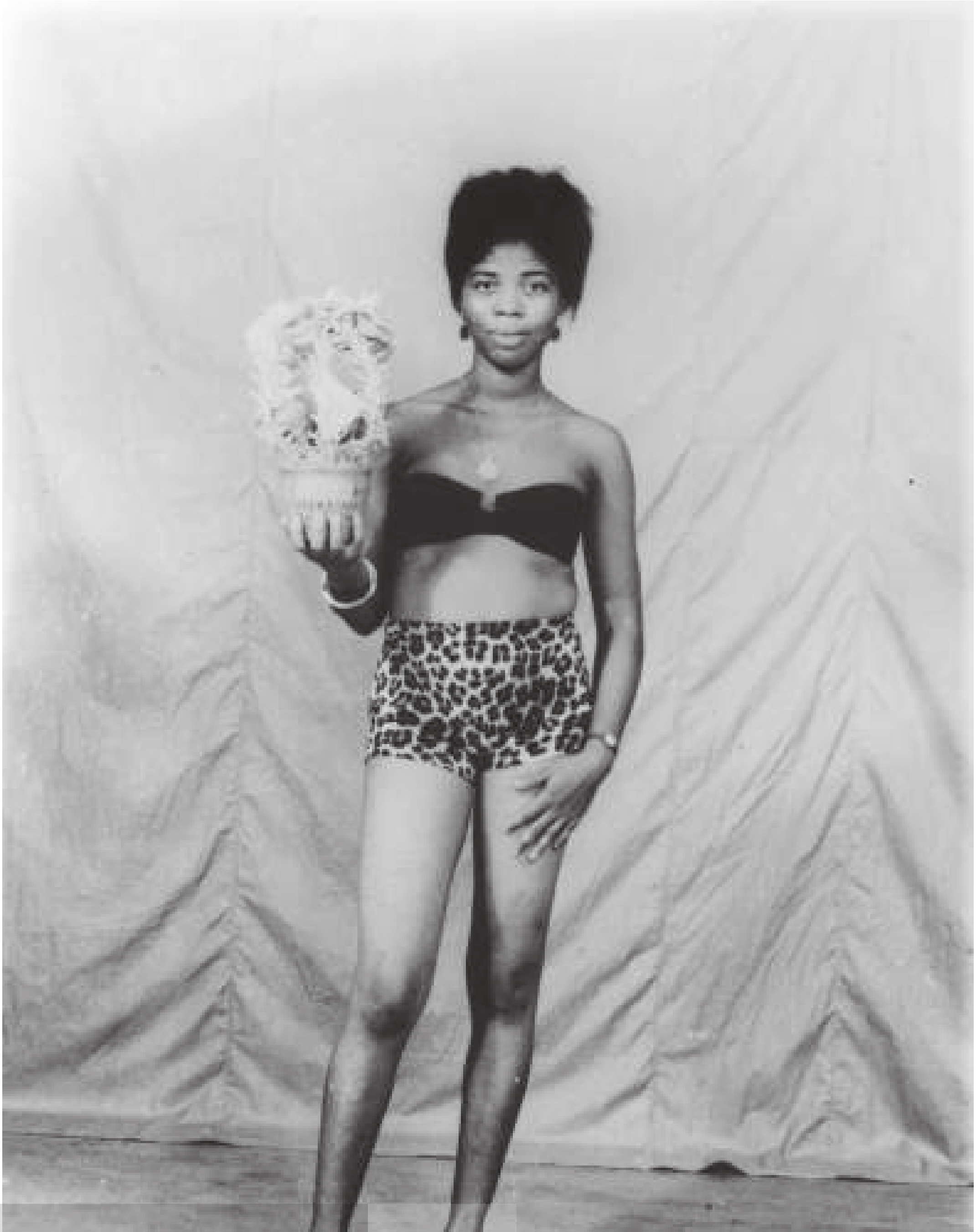
**INTRO.6 (PREVIOUS PAGE)** Double portrait of two women in lace. Photographer unknown. Saint-Louis, Senegal, late 1920s/early 1930s. Vintage print on postcard stock. Courtesy of the CRDS, Saint-Louis, Senegal.

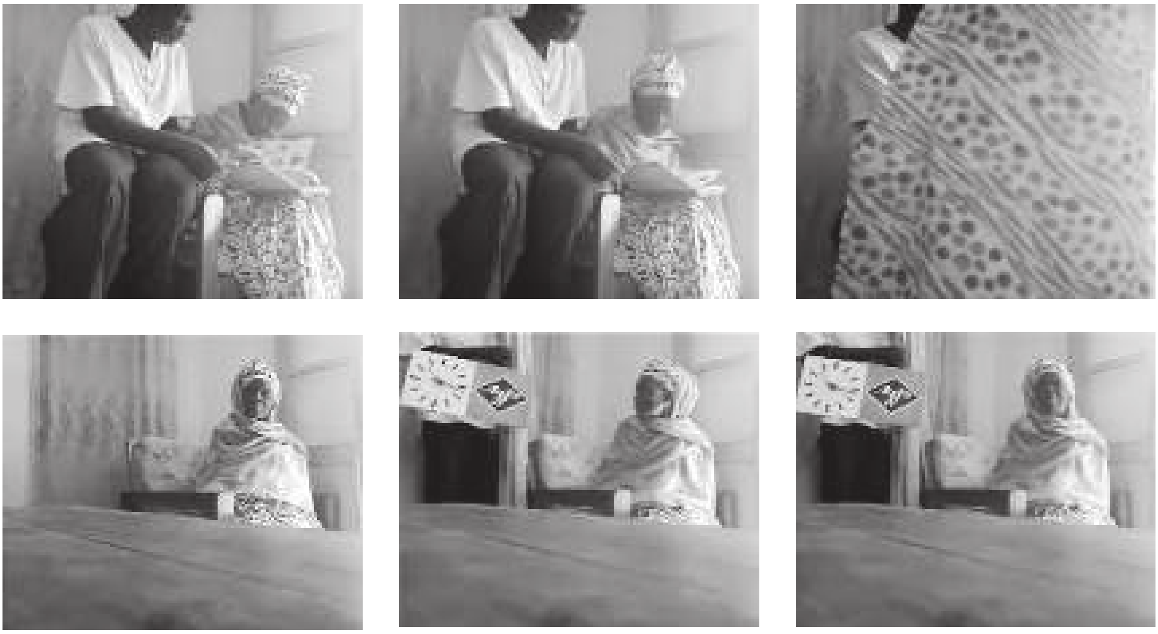
Agfa papers in Saint-Louis. In addition to the pagivolt, the Diop family also looks after an immaculately preserved Agfa clock. In 2009, when I interviewed Dossa in Porto-Novo for the first time, our conversations unfolded beneath the benevolent stare of the same Agfa clock. It was mounted above the photographer's desk, stopped at exactly 7:30.[12]

Despite all this branded merchandise and all these Agfa clocks, it is critical to note that, at the moment when photographers working in commercial studios in urban west Africa were developing loyalty to European and American brands and product lines, cameras and photographic supplies continued to travel between African capitals via African trade routes—as they had been traveling since the nineteenth century.[13] More than once while in Benin I heard stories about cameras that had come into local photographers' hands precisely *not* from France, but via overland routes from Ghana or Nigeria. Somewhat surprisingly, even in Dakar (where one feels much farther away from Ghana than in Porto-Novo or Cotonou), I found that cameras were just as likely to have come from Ghana. Even today, Ghana remains strongly associated with technical and aesthetic innovation and, specifically, with local camera production in west Africa.[14] The Burkinabé scholar Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo describes the crucial role played, in photography's early days in the region, by photographers from what is today Ghana, who plied their trade along ancient migratory routes, passing from cities in Ghana through Bobo-Dioulasso, in present-day Burkina Faso, to cities in Mali and beyond.[15] Siaka Lawani, a Cotonou-based photographer who began working professionally (doing both studio work and reportage) in the 1960s, and with whom I spoke in Cotonou in 2009, corroborated the significance of the Ghanaian influence, when he told me that, in those days, "everything came from Ghana": the best and the latest cameras, the best and the latest enlargers, the best and the latest ideas.

Ouédraogo's and Lawani's observations highlight the ongoing importance of overland, African trade routes that linked photographers and studios in different west African cities through regional and cross-regional networks. As such, they present us with a denser and more palimpsestic image of photography's late colonial and early postcolonial histories in the region, and they provide us with a critical counterweight to accounts privileging either metropolitan trade routes or colonial violence.[16] To be sure, for many African photographers and for their clients in Senegal or Benin, the act of taking or commissioning a portrait in a photography studio could be a way of staking a claim to forms of belonging and affiliation that passed through Paris—or, for that matter, through Casablanca, Cape Town, or Chicago. Yet these routes through the metropole, and, increasingly, along pan-African, transcolonial,

**INTRO.7 (NEXT PAGE)** Portrait of a woman posed with an Easter basket. Photograph: Zinsou Cosme Dossa. Porto-Novo, Benin, 1960s. Modern print made by Léonce Agbodjélou with the photographer's permission. Courtesy of the family of Zinsou Cosme Dossa.

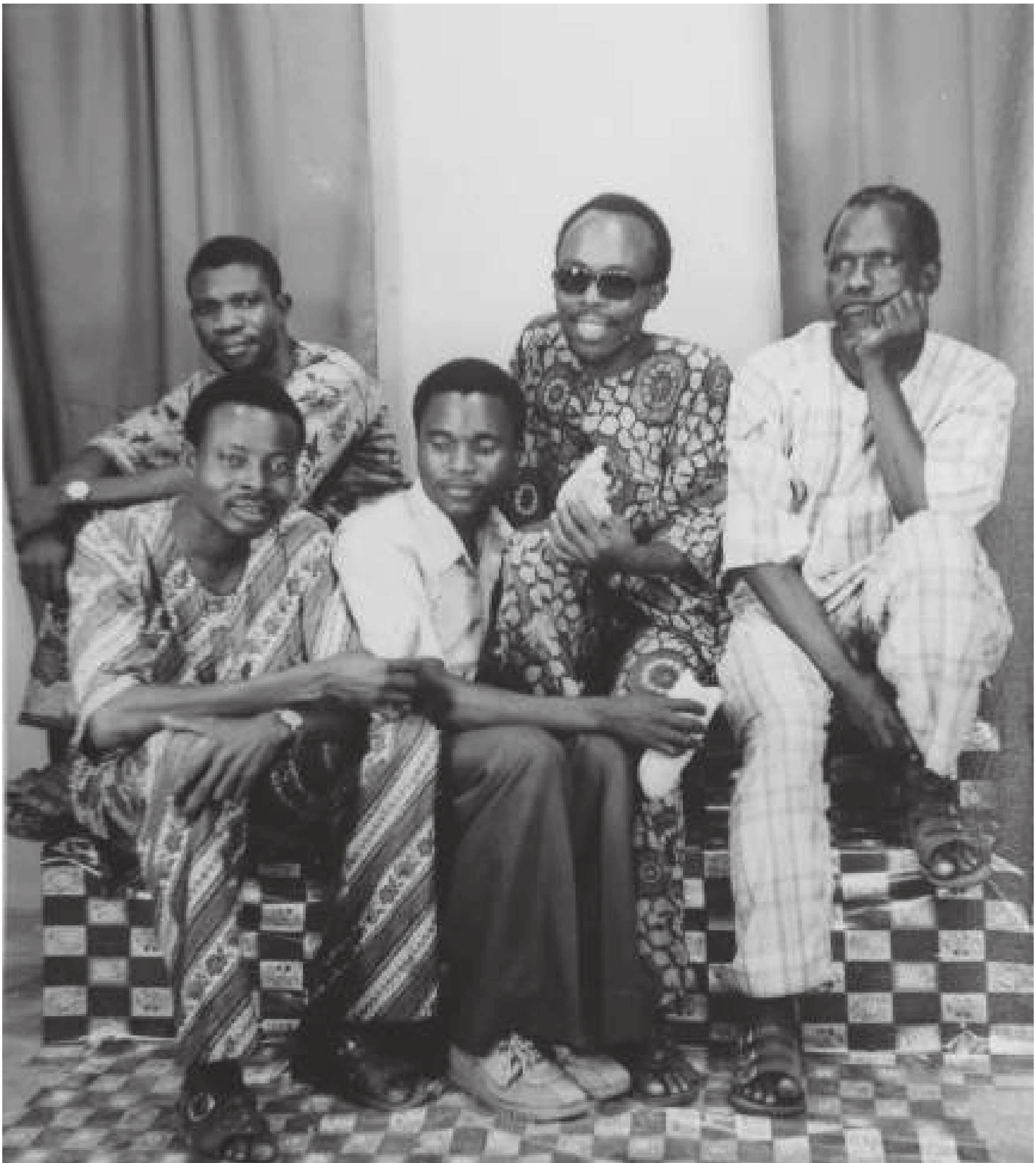




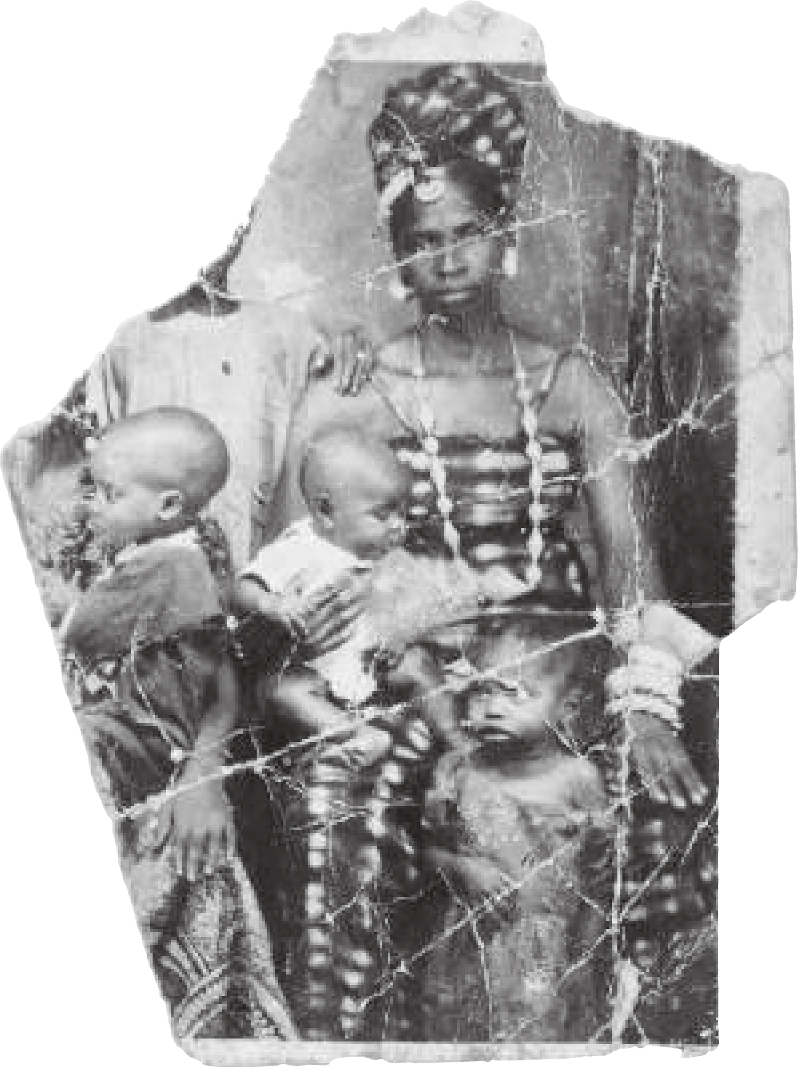
**INTRO.8 TO INTRO.13**
Stills from a video that I shot with my cell phone at the home of the photographer Mouhamadou (Doudou) Diop in Saint-Louis, Senegal, in 2007. The photographer's wife and son still look after an immaculately preserved Agfa clock, which they brought out of storage to show me.

and diasporic circuits, were invariably superimposed over other circuits, where they crisscrossed precolonial African trade routes and became embedded in distinctly African commercial relationships. In many instances, this tangled tracery of circuits was only magnified by the coming of independence, as photography, along with other media technologies, gave rise to new forms of belonging and affiliation that were themselves reconfiguring existing media networks. Perhaps ironically, then, at the very moment that European businessmen and corporations were stepping up their efforts to market cameras and photographic supplies to west Africans, and striving to reinvent colonial territories as consumer markets, these same processes were contributing to the acceleration of decolonization by multiplying west Africans' opportunities for connection within and beyond colonial structures of identification and infrastructures of communication.

My arguments proceed through formal analysis of images informed both by prior historical studies of photography in Africa and by contemporary theories of photography. But by far the most significant research that went into this book was field research carried out in the form of interviews, between 2007 and 2014, in Saint-Louis and Dakar in Senegal and in Porto-Novo and Cotonou in Benin. These included interviews with photographers of the independence generation or with their descendants, and with other members of the independence generation who collected and commissioned photographs, sometimes from these same photographers. They also included conversations



**INTRO.14** Group portrait of the Porto-Novo photographers' union. Zinsou Cosme Dossa (right) told me that the union had a group portrait taken every year. Photograph: Studio Well Come, Pascal A. Nouhoheflin, Ouando, Benin, early 1970s. Courtesy of the family of Zinsou Cosme Dossa.

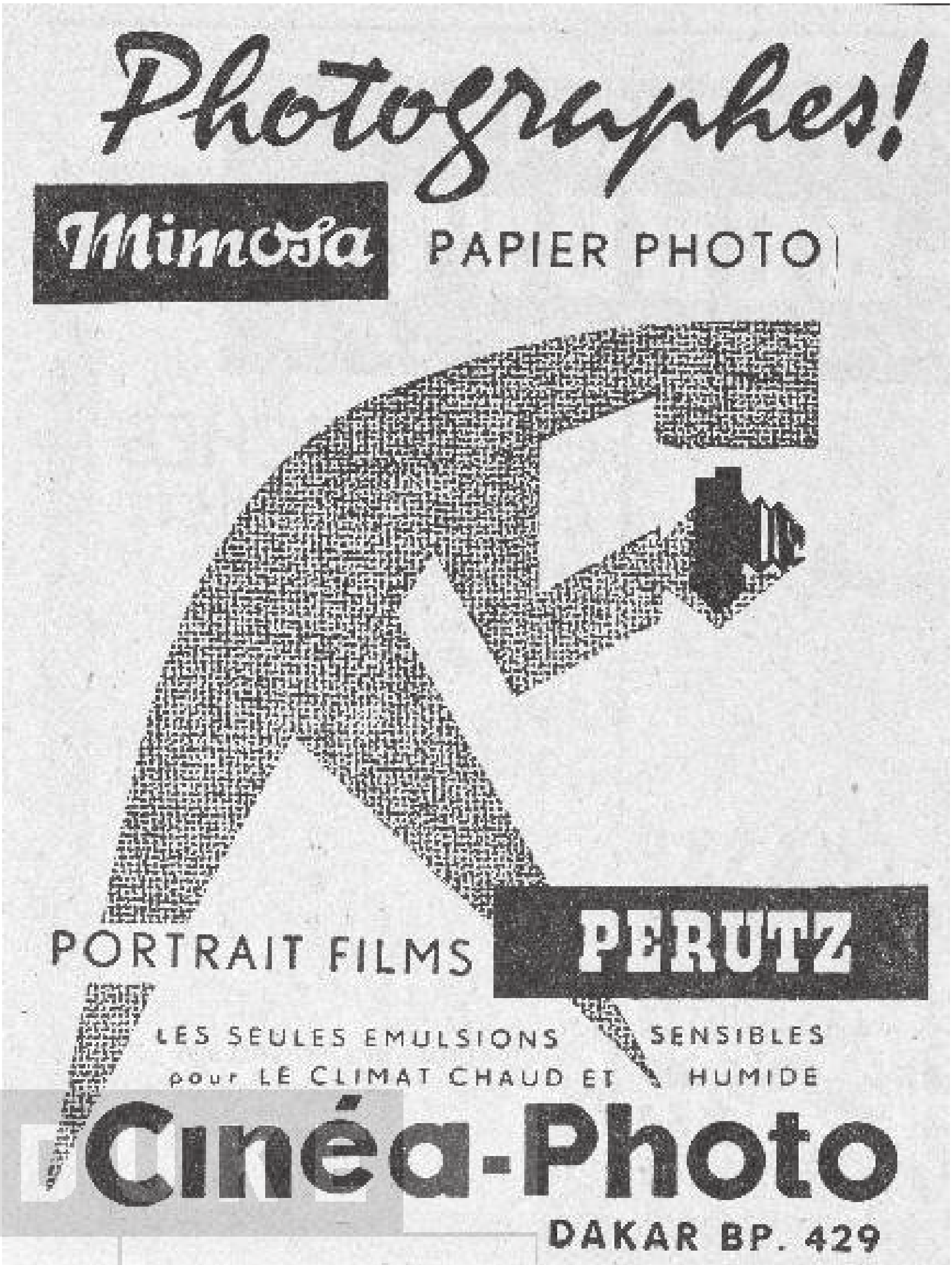


**INTRO.15** Fragment of a portrait of Aïssatou Ly (right) holding her son, Abdoulaye, along with other family members. The visible deterioration is typical of prints from this era in the region. Photographer unknown. Dakar, Senegal, 1959. Courtesy of Aïssatou Ly. Reproduction: Leslie Rabine.

**INTRO.16 (NEXT PAGE)** Advertisement for Cinéa-Photo, a photo supply store in Dakar, that ran in *Bingo* no. 84 (January 1960). The ad underscores the suitability of Mimosa photo papers and Perutz films to humid climates. Courtesy of Michel de Breteuil and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

with a younger generation of artists, photographers, and cultural heritage professionals, who are, today, the custodians of significant photography archives and collections all over west Africa. Methodologically, my research has been informed by approaches drawn from art history, anthropology, political philosophy, postcolonial studies, and African studies; true to my training in comparative literature, I also cite, and put particular photographs into conversation with, texts of postcolonial literature and film.

In insisting on this interdisciplinarity, the point is not simply to highlight the limitations of a given discipline, nor is it simply to call attention to the Eurocentrism of contemporary theories of photography—a Eurocentrism so



**Photographes!**

**Mimosa** PAPIER PHOTO

PORTRAIT FILMS **PERUTZ**

LES SEULES EMULSIONS SENSIBLES
pour LE CLIMAT CHAUD ET HUMIDE

**Cinéa-Photo**

DAKAR BP. 429

rampant as to be both incontestable and in constant need of contesting. Nor is it even simply to call attention to the colonial origins of academic disciplines, which continue to limit the knowledge we produce. It is, rather, to call attention to a need for redrawing the parameters of an entire theoretical field. I believe that this need is urgent, and that we have a unique opportunity to redraw these parameters when we start from African examples. I address more explicitly the many challenges involved in integrating multiple methods and disciplinary approaches in my research in two short methodological reflections, placed at the ends of chapters 1 and 4. These sections thematize key issues in contemporary research on mid-twentieth-century photography in west Africa, while also fleshing out the specific conditions under which I researched and wrote this book—as someone who was new both to the region and to several of the above-named disciplines and at a moment when the very boundaries of "the field" were, quite literally, up for grabs, as curators and collectors from Europe and North America were arriving in the region in increasing numbers and as museums and galleries all over the world were basically launching a second "scramble for Africa" with regard to their photography collections. The influence exerted, in particular, by collectors and by the art market on my object of study ensured that this object could not always be clearly delineated, and that methodological and geopolitical questions often became entangled. Readers less interested in methodological questions or in the powers exerted by the market should be able to skip these sections without losing the plot, and they will, in any case, have a chance to return to these questions in abridged form in the closing pages of this book.

### West African Avant-Gardes?

Theories of photography centered on its European and North American histories have long sought to explain the singularity of the photographic image in connection with the problem of representation. From the moment of the medium's inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, there emerged, in Europe and North America, an abiding concern with photography as a technology for the representation of three-dimensional space in two dimensions. The camera was uniquely suited, or so at least it seemed, to burgeoning cultural preoccupations with ideas about human progress and a concern with scientific rationality. It was prized for its supposed capacity, not simply to represent, but to perfect representation. Hence the ties that bind photography—in Europe and North America—to ideas about technical or mechanical reproducibility, realism, and metrical precision and the more general fixation, in theories of photography, on "fixing" an image of the world.

Following the Euro-American obsession with the camera as a machine for the perfection of two-dimensional representation, Euro-American scholarship has tended to conceive of photography as a rationalization of vision by technological means. In the sphere of art, this tendency was consistent, in the nineteenth century, with ideologies of the aesthetic that evolved as part of the institutionalization of painting in the European Academy.[17] In philosophy and political economy, it mirrored ideologies of Enlightenment humanism and therefore, ultimately, of industrial capitalism, privileging notions of mechanical or technological production, reproduction, and innovation linked to ideas of human progress—the same ideologies undergirding, few will deny, all of post-Enlightenment thought.[18] To be sure, there have always been exceptions to these technophilic and normative frameworks that have resulted in renegade histories of the medium. Movements as divergent as pictorialism and constructivism used anti-Enlightenment strategies to reclaim the camera for their own ends, as have histories of the medium valorizing amateur, vernacular, and snapshot photography. But these movements have been and remain outliers, in that they have failed to shake the stranglehold of representational paradigms and Enlightenment preoccupations with technological evolution on contemporary theories of the medium. Even for avant-garde European thinkers of the 1920s, for whom the (twinned) rise of fascism and of capitalism encouraged a more radical break with existing paradigms, the idea that photography was or should be on the side of progress was a through-line of writings that were, in other respects, remarkably heterodox.[19]

Conceptions of photography based on ideas about representation, mechanical reproduction, and human or technological progress can seem particularly aberrant when applied to west Africa, where Enlightenment ideologies played a nefarious role in European colonial projects—and where, prior to photography, creative and artistic practices were largely unconcerned with figurative representation or even with the production of two-dimensional likenesses. Scholars working in both art history and anthropology have observed that there is no history of easel painting predating the introduction of photography in the region; still others have argued that there is no prephotographic history of portraiture in any medium in west Africa, with the portrait defined, at least provisionally (and, some have pointed out, problematically), as the likeness of an individual—rather than, say, an abstract representation or the depiction of a deity.[20] In a parallel move, scholars have noted that in some African languages there is no word for "photograph" that is not also the word for "picture," and that, in some regions of the continent, including those where photography is omnipresent, a single word is used, without distinction, to refer to photographs and to other two-dimensional representations.[21] Such observations illustrate the profound limitations of conceptions of photography that see it as descending, chronologically or teleologically, from other technologies of two-dimensional image-making or of representation, conceptions that are simultaneously Eurocentric and incapable of accounting for much broader histories of the medium.

Not surprisingly, given the limitations of these frameworks, the earliest wave of scholarly research on photography in west Africa kept a tight focus on specifically local uses of the medium, attending, for example, to photography's influence on aesthetic, material, and experiential dimensions of social and cultural practices that predate the camera's invention. A particularly rich subset of this early work examined photography's impact on religious and spiritual life, in both indigenous religion and Islam.

Allen and Polly Roberts, to name only two of the most luminous examples, have produced a compelling and wide-ranging body of research on the powerful synergies that were forged between photography and Mouridism in Senegal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[22] Starting in the 1990s and culminating in the watershed 2003 exhibition *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts in Urban Senegal*, the Robertses developed an evocative series of arguments about the resignification of photographs in Sufi devotional practice in Senegal's dynamic (and increasingly diasporic) Mouride communities.[23] Particular images researched by the Robertses include a well-known and, in Senegal, ubiquitous "trophy" photograph of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, a celebrated Sufi saint and figure of anticolonial resistance, which was taken by the French colonial administration while Bamba was under quasi-permanent house arrest. Other images include a colonial picture postcard that was originally produced for a Western audience yet reworked, for nearly a century, by Mourides living both in Senegal and in the diaspora, into a devotional object incorporating an optical technology known as the lenticular (or "winkie") and using techniques that, today, we would call photo manipulation.[24] Among the many important contributions made by the Robertses' research has been its forceful demonstration of the impact of acts of photographic resignification on religious and spiritual life in west Africa. Interestingly, the particular images they selected to illustrate this resignification (trophy photographs and colonial picture postcards) often functioned as instruments of colonial violence in the contexts of their production. Yet, today, these images circulate in local and global contexts in which they have, at least in part thanks to their resignification, little or no association with colonialism.

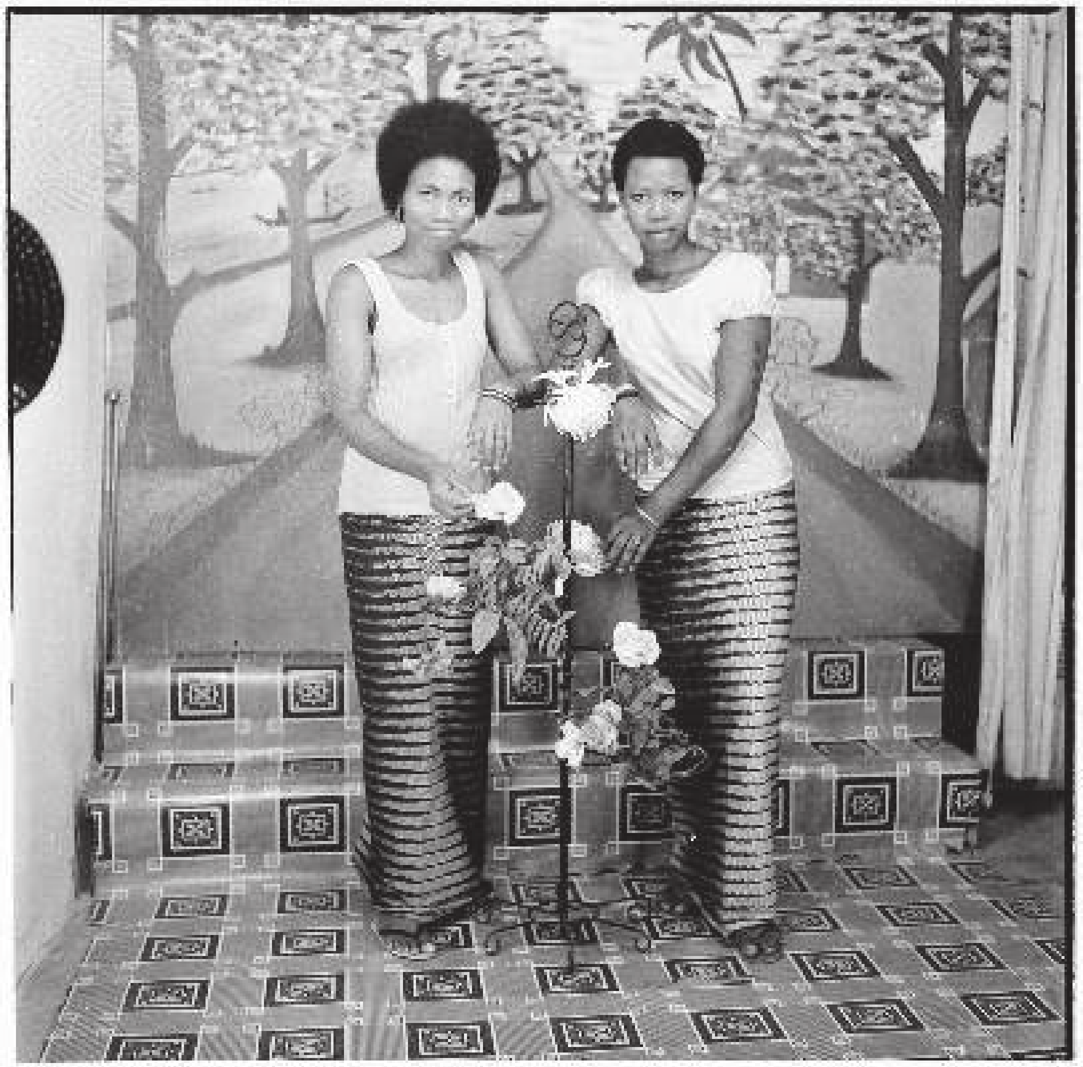
Other early scholarship on photography in west Africa plumbed the medium's local histories by tracing its influence, beyond particular images, on the aesthetic qualities of particular ritual objects and, in some cases, on the technical processes by which they are made. Emblematic of this approach is Rowland Abiodun's stunning research on *ako* funeral effigies in Owo (a Yoruba-dominant region in southwest Nigeria), which, he argues, borrow poses from nineteenth-century photographic portraiture—and not, as had been assumed, the other way around.[25] Abiodun's work on ako funeral effigies and, more specifically, their relationship to photography gives us new insights into the importance of photographic portraiture in Yoruba cultures. Beyond the specific insights that it gives us in the Yoruba context, however, Abiodun's work on ako is of value to scholars of photography more generally for its unworking of overly facile understandings of the relationship between "tradition" and "modernity." In fact, in Abiodun's work, photography itself undoes the binary of "tradition" and "modernity," to the extent that it has been integrated into the aesthetics, rituals, and material culture of "traditional" life in Owo.[26]

The influence of photography on the life of ritual objects in west Africa was similarly taken up by Stephen Sprague, in his 1978 study of the role played by photography in Yoruba twin ceremonies.[27] In this study, now well known due to its twenty-first-century republication, Sprague observes that photographs are often substituted for the three-dimensional effigies, usually wooden sculptures, of a deceased twin or twins (known in Yoruba as *èrè ibeji*), used in twin ceremonies. In these ceremonies, which are widespread in both Nigeria and Benin, the effigy—or, in some cases, the photograph—is a proxy for the dead twin or twins, who are expected to participate in the twin ceremonies alongside any living sibling or siblings.[28] Interestingly, when photographs are substituted for the wooden sculptures, they are not necessarily, as we might at first imagine, images of the deceased twin. Rather, they are photographs of the living sibling, dressed and posed so as to appear, in the photograph, as if she were her (deceased) sibling(s). In some cases, the living twin is even photographed and printed in multiple exposures (double or triple), presented, as Sprague points out, as both herself and the other(s).[29]

Aesthetically speaking, the substitution of a photograph for a wooden effigy here constitutes a significant innovation, for it opens the effigy to new axes of likeness or resemblance and produces the double or twin through new forms of plastic and temporal manipulation. For theories of photography, the innovation is equally significant, for it brings the concept of the photograph ever closer to that of the twin—rather than, say, to that of the image. Indeed, so foreign is an interpretation of the photograph as "a fixed image," or as an imprint or trace connected with a singular presence (some thing "that was there"), to west African photographic practices and histories of photography that Angelo Micheli, who has also written extensively about twins and photographic portraiture in west Africa, proposes that we conceive of the photograph not as the "material trace" of an individual or other presence, but as its "plastic counterpart."[30] These and other photographic theories of the twin, which emphasize the photograph's plasticity over its fixity, offer us a radically different point of departure for understanding the status of the photographic image, and they point us toward new theoretical frameworks that do not privilege two-dimensional representation or theories of the image per se.

The artist and scholar Olu Oguibe, too, grants exceptional theoretical weight to the concept of plasticity in west Africa when he observes that the photograph is understood to remain "manipulable long after its production" in Yoruba cultures, in which photography is characterized by a radical "open-endedness."[31] Oguibe goes on to posit this enduring manipulability and open-endedness as core tenets of a Yoruba philosophy of photography, which he beautifully summarizes thus: "The image in the picture is not inert, only temporarily contained."[32] Jean-François Werner advances a similar framework for articulating a philosophy of photography in Côte d'Ivoire, based on original research carried out with studio photographers and on studio photography in the north of that country, a geographic and cultural area quite distant from that in the Yoruba examples just cited.[33] Werner argues that, in Côte d'Ivoire, photographs are valued not for their supposed fixity or perfection of representation, but for the unique forms of manipulability and plasticity they afford. He goes on to add that the photographic image's plastic qualities are part of what give the medium an outsized historical and political significance in Côte d'Ivoire: "The central function assigned to photography in the making of new collective and individual identities stems from [its] remarkable plasticity."[34] These and other arguments emphasizing the centrality of plasticity to photography in west Africa run directly counter to conceptions of photography that elevate fixity, permanence, and capture over transformation, revision, and flux, and that find their apotheosis in positivist interpretations of the photographic index.[35]

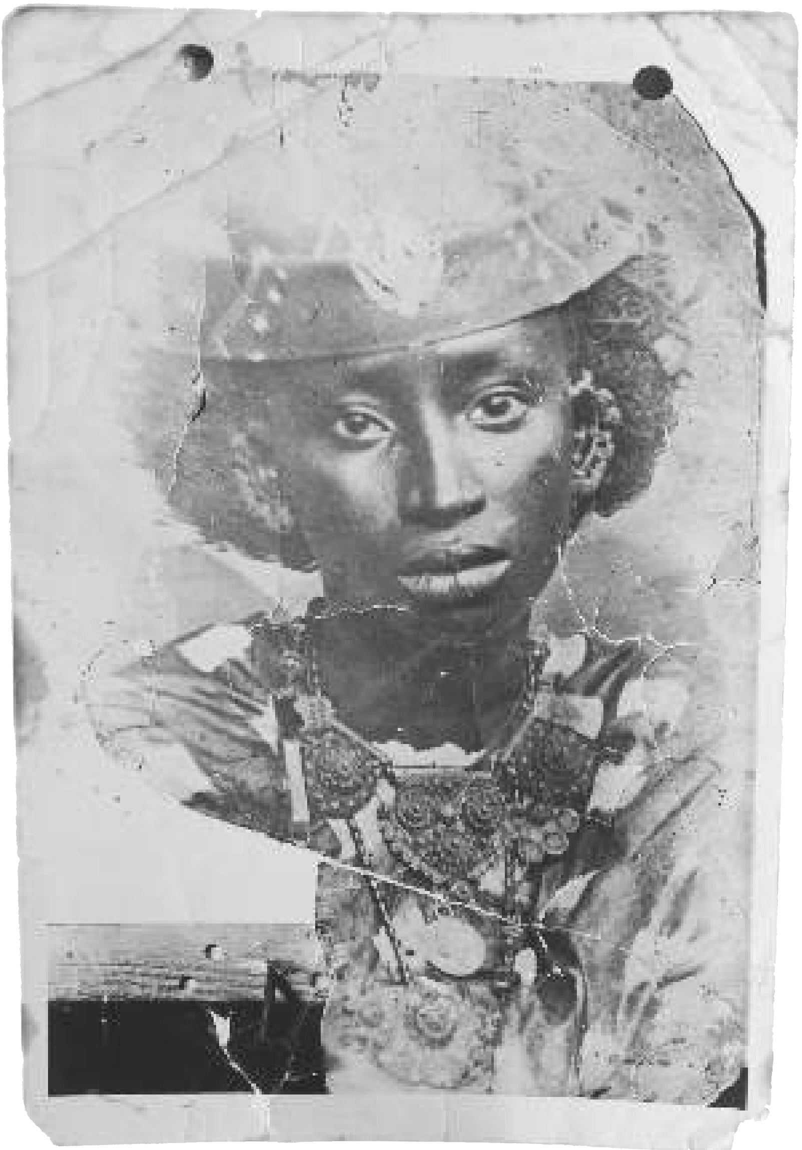
More recent scholarship on the history of photography in west Africa has continued to valorize this plasticity and openness to change. Over the last decade and a half, an impressive body of new research has made even more explicit connections between this radical open-endedness of the photographic image and other processes of social and political change. This research has empha-



sized the transformations facilitated by photography in the sphere of fashion, concepts of beauty, gender identity, racial identity, and marriage customs; in entrepreneurship and associated commercial structures; and in new forms, and spaces, of collective belonging and affiliation. In addition to scholars such as Mamadou Diouf (Senegal), Tanya Elder (Mali), Liam Buckley (The Gambia), Erin Haney (Ghana), Érika Nimis (Yoruba contexts and multiple contexts in Francophone west Africa), Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo (Burkina Faso), and Leslie Rabine (Senegal), whom I cite at greater length in later chapters, this expansion of the field has been carried out in published research, curatorial practice, and archival projects by Heike Behrend (Kenya), Julie Crooks

**INTRO.17** Double portrait of women in matching outfits. This photograph can be considered part of a larger class of "twin" image, common in west Africa, in which twin relationships, whether biological or spiritual, are evoked. Photograph: Benoît Adjovi, Cotonou, Benin, 1970s. Courtesy of Benoît Adjovi.

**INTRO.18** Oumou Khady Guèye. The portrait has been reproduced through serial rephotography (producing a new print by rephotographing a print, rather than striking a new print from a negative). Photographer unknown. Dakar, Senegal, early 1930s (first print); 1958 (print that was digitally rephotographed in 2007). Collection of Ibrahima Faye and Khady Ndoye, courtesy of Gnilane Ly Faye. Reproduction: Leslie Rabine.



(Sierra Leone and diasporic contexts), Marian Nur Goni (Somalia, Djibouti, and diasporic contexts), Pamila Gupta (Zanzibar), Patricia Hayes (Namibia and South Africa), Patricia Hickling (Senegal), Candace Keller (Mali), George Mahashe (South Africa), Prita Meier (Zanzibar and the larger Swahili Coast), Renée Mussai (Ghana), Hudita Mustapha (Senegal), Franck Ogou (Benin), Giulia Paoletti (Senegal), John Peffer (South Africa), Kerstin Pinther (Ghana and the Maghreb), Jürg Schneider and Rosario Mazuela (Cameroon), Bisi Silva (Nigeria), Andrea Stultiens (Uganda), Richard Vokes (Uganda), and Tobias

Wendl (Ghana). Collectively, this research has taught us vital new lessons—about photography's power to transform existing social and cultural practices and experiences *and* its power to create new ones—many of which remain to be taken up by dominant histories of photography.

No account of the "state of the field" would be complete without acknowledging the many artists and practitioners who, over the past two decades, have used historical and archival photographs from myriad cities and countries in Africa in their work. These include Sammy Baloji (Democratic Republic of Congo), Maryam Jafri (multiple archives in Africa, read comparatively with those from Asia and elsewhere in the "Global" South), George Mahashe (South Africa), Santu Mofokeng (South Africa), Zineb Sedira (Algeria), Andrea Stultiens (Uganda), Ibrahima Thiam (Senegal), and Fatimah Tuggar (Northern Nigeria and the diaspora). These and other artists are mobilizing historical and archival photographs from African collections in order to pose questions about photographic temporalities, postcolonial historiography, and decolonial knowledge production. Although I do not cite them as regularly as I might, I have both learned from and drawn inspiration from these artists' work, and readers interested in contemporary art will have no difficulty tracing the influence on this book of this still-unfolding dialogue.

### Photography and Decolonial Imagination

Twenty-first-century theoretical writing on photography has been marked by renewed interest in photography's political significance and arguments for what is today sometimes called its political ontology. This is not to say that prominent twentieth-century thinkers, including Walter Benjamin, Allan Sekula, and Susan Sontag, were not already excavating alternative political ontologies for the medium, if not in so many words. In the case of Benjamin and Sekula, an attempt to move theoretical reflection on photography beyond bourgeois and normative paradigms took the form of an explicitly Marxist and materialist reflection on the medium, which emphasized its role in extending the phantasms of commodity fetishism and promoting bourgeois consciousness.[36] Arguably, these Marxist and materialist approaches to photography have been less Eurocentric than some, to the extent that their analysis targets capitalism as a global system.[37] Yet these approaches have offered little traction in west African contexts, in which both industrial production and bourgeois consciousness have been analyzed, to this day, largely as epiphenomena of colonialism, with scant consideration given to local conditions and constructions of capitalist modernity. Such an approach to industrialization and related technological developments in colonial Africa is both historically and theoretically inadequate, for it runs the risk of reasserting the most simplistic version of dependency theory and of keeping us trapped in center-and-periphery models. In this book, I repeatedly pose questions about the implication of industrialization, commodity production, and bourgeois and proletarian class positions in the democratization of photography in the (former) AOF while simultaneously placing this democratization against the backdrop of decolonization and liberation movements, which were motivated by collectivist and anticapitalist desires. I have rarely found satisfying answers to these questions, yet it felt important to at least speculate about the relationships between capitalism, late coloniality, and photography on the continent, on the premise that a more nuanced interpretation of these relationships must inflect, and be inflected by, future research.

In Sontag's case, the critique of liberal and normative histories of photography was oriented by certain moral and ethical dilemmas that she perceived to be inherent in the medium, which she understood, it can now seem presciently, to have produced a seismic shift in the global image ecology.[38] Interestingly, many of the questions that Sontag raised about these moral and ethical dimensions of photography in the 1970s have, today, been reinvigorated in new theoretical work unfolding under the sign of the affective turn.[39] Recent theories of affect have reframed the moral, ethical, and ethico-political questions first posed by Sontag about photography—questions, for example, about the power of a given photographic image or images to harm or to heal—precisely by challenging paradigms predicated on moral judgments or on discursive rights claims and by advancing, in their place, theories emphasizing the embodied nature of image perception. Somewhat perplexingly, however, these new affect theories appear to have overlooked the vast literature on the embodied, sensory, and aesthetic dimensions of image perception that emerged from an important wave of anthropological research on photography starting in the late 1990s.

Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Pinney, to name two of the most influential scholars associated with this anthropological turn, unleashed a veritable methodological revolution in the fields of anthropology, ethnography, and museum studies when they began to zero in, precisely, on the sensory and embodied dimensions of photographic experience. Both Edwards and Pinney, working in diverse colonial and postcolonial cultural and geographic contexts (not surprisingly, most of them outside Europe), teach us to theorize the effects of photographs as they unfurl, not in some kind of abstract situation of looking (or touching, or feeling), but in the moment that specific photographs are interpolated by specific actors, situated in specific cultures, as physical or material objects.[40] Hence the particularly close attention paid by anthropologists to dimensions of photographic experience that extend beyond the sphere of the visual, and their attribution of complex forms of agency to photographs, henceforth reconceptualized not only as objects but as agents with "social lives" of their own. Another, equally vital contribution of these anthropological and museum studies approaches has been their trenchant critique of ocularcentrism and of the unabashed Eurocentrism of the "five sense" model, a critique that has resounded, methodologically, as a clarion call to attend, often (although not exclusively) through ethnographic methods, to both oral and aural or sonic dimensions of photographic interpretation and, by extension, to the medium's articulation with multiple and overlapping modes of memory.[41] Scholars writing, more recently, about photography in Black studies contexts have also turned their attention to dimensions of the photographic image that exceed the sphere of the visual, generating exceedingly rich theorizations of memory, with Tina Campt's eloquent writing about the "haptic image" and related aural and sonic dimensions of the photographic image being a particularly instructive example.[42] Without hewing to anthropological paradigms, and without wanting in any way to disregard the specificity of the multiple and distinctive diasporic contexts in which Campt and other Black studies scholars are working, my own research has been inspired by these and other approaches that have both renewed and deepened our understanding of the materiality and agency of photographs, with all of the consequences that this entails.

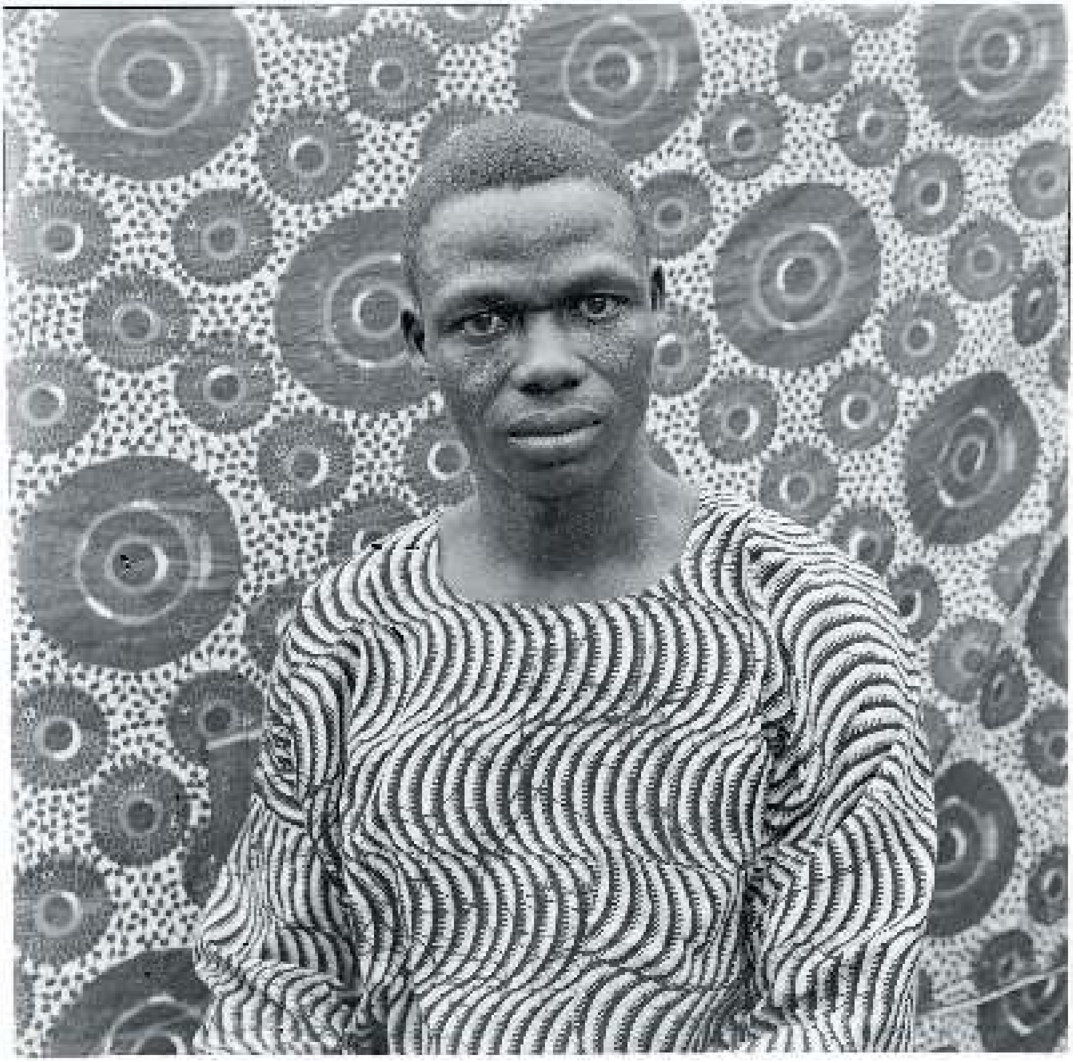
Some have recently found a third way between Marxist theories of photography and those grounded in affective or anthropological paradigms in the work of Ariella Azoulay, who posits for photography a single political ontology, oriented by what she calls photography's "civil contract" or "civil imagination."[43] I, too, am deeply indebted to Azoulay's work, which has done more than almost anyone else's to further our contemporary understanding of photography as a radical deterritorialization of the spaces in which rights claims and other, less explicitly (or differently) discursive bids for recognition can take place.[44] And yet, despite my own deep investments in photographic forces and experiences of deterritorialization, I have not found Azoulay's theories of the "civil contract" or of civil imagination to be helpful in the interpretation of my material. For one thing, the idea that there could be "a" political ontology of photography risks narrowing our understanding of photographic deterritorialization to one derived from particular geographic and geocultural histories and frames (in Azoulay's case, Israel/Palestine). No less importantly, and related to questions of territoriality and deterritorialization, Azoulay's concept of the "civil contract" rehabilitates a concept of citizenship that is irrevocably mired in European and colonial political histories, as scholars of photography working in non-European and postcolonial contexts, most notably Patricia Hayes and Thy Phu, have recently pointed out.[45] Still others, working in Francophone African contexts, have shown that the very concept of civility has been inextricably bound up with colonial, neocolonial, and neo-imperial ideologies in the region, and that it has been particularly closely bound up with the West's "civilizing"—or, more recently, "humanitarian"—mission in Africa, ensuring that its contemporary redeployment in this context remains deeply problematic.[46]

This is not to say that the concept of citizenship has no place in the forms of political imagination that I explore in this book. People living in west Africa actively participated in the 1789 revolution in France, and west Africans had a voice in articulating Republican concepts and ideals of citizenship from a vantage point on the continent at later moments. The city of Saint-Louis submitted its own *cahier de doléances* to the meeting of the Estates General at Versailles in 1789.[47] Beyond the cahier (whose signatories were mostly white Frenchmen, although some are thought to have been mixed-race members of the city's large and politically powerful *métisse* community), Senegal has a long history of participation in institutions of Republican citizenship that were claimed by, and codified for, a small but politically significant subset of Africans, precisely *in the context of* the French colonial project, which these same institutions and concepts were ultimately used to contest.[48] In light of this history, and this African heritage of French Republicanism that is, still today, all too often repressed, we must acknowledge that the concept of citizenship that was simultaneously claimed and invented by the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* owes a debt not just to colonial but to *African* history.[49] It also owes a debt, specifically, to creolized (in the rich sense) identities that were forged *in* Africa. These fuller histories of colonial and imperial citizenship and their Africanization prior to and in the moment of postcolonial liberation—a process that took place, I argue, with and through photography—are central to part II of this book.

In bringing this discussion of citizenship to a close, I should note that the ties that bind citizenship to the struggle for liberation *and therefore to the postcolonial state* in the photographic record of this period of west African history are remarkably elastic and cannot be dismissed as a symptom of "methodological nationalism" (in postcolonial studies, nationalism viewed purely as a means to an end in the context of anticolonial struggle). On the contrary, the concept of citizenship was actively reclaimed, reworked, and reimagined by anticolonial actors in west Africa, and, in the decade immediately preceding independence, this concept became increasingly tied to a projection of the postcolonial state without which liberation had become unthinkable—a phenomenon that I explore more fully in chapter 5, through an examination of post-independence practices of ID-card photography.[50] The affinities between photography and the state form an intricate skein that was woven by African photographers, their subjects, and their publics through images and practices that include, but also ultimately exceed, the category of state-sponsored ID-card photography. These questions, images, and practices, I contend, merit closer inspection and more nuanced interpretation than they can be given within the framework of Azoulay's and other contemporary theories of visual citizenship, which risk rendering these questions invisible, given these theories' overdetermination by Western histories of the state form and their tendency to posit the state in opposition to forms of political imagination associated with popular liberation.[51]

I use the term "political imagination," in the sense that I understand it to be used by political philosopher Partha Chatterjee, to refer to spaces of political action, relation, and participation that cannot be adequately defined either by forms of political organization associated with the modern nation-state or by the institutions of modern capitalist democracy.[52] The sphere denoted by the term "political imagination" cannot, by definition, be localized in space or time. Rather, this sphere is, as Chatterjee himself stresses, spatially and temporally discontinuous, and it is produced through acts of imagination and experiences of political belonging "that give on to larger than face-to-face solidarities."[53] No less importantly, these solidarities depend on the making and positing of ideas, and images, of political community that may not (yet) be realized, aligning them with temporal experiences of prolepsis and with the "to-come" of messianic time. This book explores photographs from mid-twentieth-century archives in west Africa, not simply as historical documents, but as engines for the production of this time. As such, it asks about both actual and potential, past and future, contributions to decolonial political imagination of the photographs it discusses.

As many readers will recognize, I borrow the word "decolonial" from Walter Mignolo, who borrowed it from Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, who coined it in an essay on "the coloniality of power." This genealogy is important, for the word "coloniality" (in Spanish, *colonialidad*) is patterned morphologically on the word "modernity" (*modernidad*)—of which, Mignolo maintains, it



**INTRO.19** Portrait of a man before a wax-print textile backdrop. This particular textile is a variation on a well-known pattern found across west Africa that is sometimes called "Deep Wells," or, alternatively, "Records" or "Gramophone." Photograph: Benoît Adjovi, Cotonou, Benin, 1970s. Courtesy of Benoît Adjovi.

is "the invisible and constitutive side."[54] Decolonial thought is thus, according to its theoretical and conceptual elaboration, a critique of contemporary modes not just of knowledge or of knowing but of knowledge *production*, insofar as they have been determined by colonial histories of power. My citation of Mignolo's terminology is, among other things, an acknowledgment of his fundamental claim: that these histories have not only produced our present but radically constrain it, and that they will continue to do so until new methods and protocols of knowledge production can be devised. Those working in Latin American historical and intellectual traditions, or on decolonial aesthetics in a spirit that hews, perhaps, more closely to the letter of Mignolo's texts, will find my use of the term unsatisfying to the extent that it performs a

**INTRO.20** Caroline Diop at a microphone. Diop was active in Senegalese politics starting in 1945, and in 1963 she became the first woman elected to the Senegalese parliament. Photographer unknown. Dakar, Senegal, 1960s. Collection of Ibrahima Faye and Khady Ndoye, courtesy of Gnilane Ly Faye. Reproduction: Leslie Rabine.

relatively weak "delinking" from modernity. Photography and its surrounding discourses are indeed difficult to delink from modernity. And yet, as I have already begun to sketch in this introduction, with reference to Abiodun's scholarship on ako (in which photography breaks down the distinction between tradition and modernity), or to the approaches of anthropologists and Black studies scholars who have invited us to rethink photography's agency in spheres extending beyond the visual, such delinking is not impossible. And in a sense this is the ultimate horizon of this book: to imagine or envision, through photography, the end of colonial modernity. For, as we will see, the photographs and photographic practices that were used by African photographers, their subjects, and their publics to remake colonial histories and legacies gave rise not simply to an African "image" of colonial modernity, but to a distinctly African *vision* of what had already begun to succeed that modernity. My intention, in placing photography and these photographs under the aegis of decolonial imagination, is in a sense to try to "re-see" that vision, which far exceeds anything that could ever be made visible, let alone fixed, in a single photograph.

### Note on Geography, Spelling, and Language

1 Ouédraogo, *Arts photographiques en Afrique*, 96.

### Preface

1 Georges Meurillon describes Keïta's portraits as representations of people "who are expressing a will to signify, represent, and authenticate this 'transition' from the status of a colonized subject to that, precisely, of a citizen, free or on the way to being free [qui expriment une volonté de signifier, représenter, authentifier ce 'passage' du statut de colonisé à celui là, de citoyen justement, et libre ou en voie de l'être]." Meurillon, "Seydou Keïta," n.p.

### Introduction

1 Tanya Elder notes that Malian photographers living in cities far from the Dakar-Niger rail line were the first to take advantage of French mail-order labs, which did color-film processing for west African photographers even after independence. Those living nearer to the rail line sent their film by train to labs in Dakar. Elder, "Capturing Change," 186–187.

2 I should also emphasize that Dossa was, as far as we know, the first photographer to be officially employed *as a photographer* by the French, as many local photographers held positions in the colonial administration not as photographers but as customs officers or as accountants, such as Meïssa Gaye (a well-known Senegalese photographer who worked as a customs officer across the AOF) and Doudou Diop (who worked as an accountant in the French army, in Saint-Louis, Senegal). An earlier generation of Africans worked taking photographs for the colonial administration on a casual basis or as part of their military service.

3 Dossa passed away, as I was still writing this book, in August 2013. Since then, his studio archives have become the basis of an important photographic preservation project, organized by Franck Ogou under the auspices of the École du Patrimoine Africain, in Porto-Novo, Benin.

4 Haney, *Photography and Africa*, 13. For an earlier, if more schematic, treatment of this history, see Bensusan, *Silver Images*, 7–8.

5 See again Haney, *Photography and Africa*, 13; Bensusan, *Silver Images*, 7–8; and Perez, *Focus East*, 196. See also Oguibe, “Photography and the Substance of the Image.” Oguibe claims that for the Khedive Mehmet to use the daguerreotype machine was “to wrest from Vernet the power of the new technique” (231).

6 For an example of this now well-known approach to African photography history, which privileges the camera’s relationship to colonial violence, see Paul Landau’s introduction to Landau and Kaspin, *Images and Empires*.

7 Haney, *Photography and Africa*, 24–25.

8 For a more detailed history of early studio photographers and their patrons in Gold Coast, see Haney, “If These Walls Could Talk!”

9 Haney has established through meticulous original research that local markets for photography and specifically for portraiture produced by local, African-born photographers were especially significant in urban west Africa (as distinct from many other parts of the continent) from the earliest days. Despite the persistence of gaps, there is now a rich scholarly literature on nineteenth and early twentieth-century photography in west Africa. See, again, Bensusan, *Silver Images*; Crooks, “Alphonso Lisk-Carew”; David, *Alex A. Acolatse*; Gbadegesin, “Picturing the Modern Self”; Haney, *Photography and Africa*; Hickling, “Early Photographs of Edmond Fortier”; Killingray and Roberts, “Outline History of Photography in Africa to ca. 1940”; Monti, *Africa Then*; Shumard, *Durable Memento*; and Viditz-Ward, “Photography in Sierra Leone, 1850–1918.” In addition, several of the essays in Saint Leon et al., *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, discuss early photography histories in the region.

10 Diop’s studio is central to my discussion in chapter 1.

11 I strongly suspect that this revolving picture frame was not actually manufactured by Kodak. Yet André was clear in his conviction that his father was being rewarded for his loyalty to Kodak when he was gifted the frame by France Photo, his metropolitan supplier. Todd Gustavson, the technology curator at the George Eastman Museum, shares the view that the frame was not manufactured by Kodak. Todd Gustavson, personal communication with the author, February 2, 2018.

12 In a comparative framework, see Akram Zaatari’s photographs of the studio of Hashem El Madani, in Saida, Lebanon. Zaatari’s images of the interior of El Madani’s studio meticulously document the display of the Kodak and Gevaert logos on clocks, fans, and posters, suggesting that such displays of brand loyalty were hardly unique to west Africa. I saw Zaatari’s photographs of El Madani’s studio (which, I gather, operated at roughly the same time as Diop’s) at the New Museum in New York, in the exhibition *Here and Elsewhere*, in September 2014.

13 Original research by Haney and Jürg Schneider underscores the importance of this regional and cross-regional trade in cameras, films, papers, and other photographic supplies to early west African photography histories. See, again, Haney, *Photography and Africa*, 23–24; and Schneider, “Portrait Photography.”

14 See Tobias Wendl’s and Nancy du Plessis’s documentary film, *Future Remembrance: Photography and Image Arts in Ghana*, which features a sequence on the

artisanal production of wooden view cameras in Kumasi. A particular camera that traveled from Ghana to Senegal plays a starring role in chapter 5.

15 Ouédraogo, *Arts photographiques en Afrique*, 96. See also Érika Nimis's vitally important book, *Photographes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*, which traces the movement of Yoruba photographers along regional and cross-regional migratory and trade routes.

16 Haney argues for the primacy of these intra-African circuits in photography's coastal histories from the medium's earliest days, noting that, already in the nineteenth century, photographers based in coastal cities rarely associated the medium with Europe, and that photographers and cameras as well as photographs often moved through cities in coastal west Africa without the intervention, or mention, of Europeans. Haney, *Photography and Africa*, 23–34.

17 Among the more (in)famous attempts to reconcile the promise of the new medium with Academic discourse about painting is Charles Baudelaire's scathing condemnation of photography in the "Salon of 1859"—in the section titled, presciently, "The Modern Public and Photography." Baudelaire, "Salon of 1859," 153.

18 The Western preoccupation with photography as a subspecies of technical innovation in the arena of image production has continued, even in philosophies of photography that see themselves as having broken with Enlightenment thought. Vilém Flusser, for example, exemplifies this tradition, when he argues for an ontology of photography as a "technical" image. See Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*.

19 See, in addition to the well-known texts that I cite below by Walter Benjamin, texts advancing notions of the "optical unconscious," by such avant-garde thinkers as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray. Moholy-Nagy, "Photography"; Ray, "Age of Light."

20 Julius Lips was among the first to argue that there was no portraiture in Africa: "A portrait in our sense, above all a portrait with as close a resemblance as possible to the original, is unknown to primitive peoples" (Lips, *Savage Hits Back*, 49). More recently, others have contested this argument, including, perhaps most helpfully, Jean M. Borgatti and Richard Brilliant, in two texts published in the exhibition catalogue *Likeness and Beyond*. See also Ola Oloidi's article on the Nigerian painter, Aina Onabolu, in which he effectively argues that painted portraiture began with Onabolu: Oloidi, "Defender of African Creativity." I am grateful to Erin Haney for sharing this reference with me.

21 I am grateful to Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie for first calling the question of language to my attention, in a particularly memorable conversation that we had in Santa Barbara in 2007. Andrea Stultiens has also explored the question of language in her research on photography in Uganda, and she has observed that, in Luganda, a single word, *kifaananyi*, derived from the verb "to be similar to" (or "to be like"), is used to mean "image," "likeness," "picture," "photograph," and "painting" and that no distinction is therefore made between a two-dimensional likeness produced in one or another of these media for Luganda speakers. See

Stultiens, *Ebifananyi I*, which contains a dictionary definition of kifaananyi on its last (unnumbered) page.

22 The Mourides are a Sufi sect in Senegal and one of the three Muslim brotherhoods that dominate religious life in the country. Their presence has been particularly significant in urban contexts in Senegal, and they are known, today, for their participation in global trade—hence their highly visible presence in the Senegalese diaspora.

23 Roberts et al., *Saint in the City*.

24 On the photographic manipulation of devotional images in particular, see Roberts and Roberts, "Flickering Images, Floating Signifiers"; and Roberts, "Tempering 'the Tyranny of Already.'" "Flickering Images" treats a particularly fascinating example of resignification: a "winkie," or lenticular, that incorporates a colonial-era image taken in Tunisia by the photographer Rudolf Lehnert—a well-known producer of colonial picture postcards, often featuring eroticized images of young North African men—and reimagines it as a portrait of the prophet Mohammed.

25 Abiodun, "Reconsideration of the Function of *Ako*, Second Burial Effigy in Owo."

26 Abiodun coins the term "*ako*-graphy" to refer to this integration, and to the reciprocal interaction between photography and other objects, traditions, and processes.

27 Sprague's essay, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," was originally published in *African Arts* in 1978 and reprinted, more recently, in Pinney and Peterson, *Photography's Other Histories*.

28 In fact, Marilyn Houlberg was the first to write about the substitution of photographs for *èrè ibeji* (Houlberg, "Ibeji Images of the Yoruba," 27), but Sprague was the first to undertake systematic study of the photographs themselves.

29 For a more recent treatment of doubles and twins in west African photography that also touches on Yoruba cosmology, see Micheli, "Double Portraits," and "Doubles and Twins."

30 Micheli, "Doubles and Twins," 72.

31 Oguibe, "Photographic Experience," 11. The Yoruba are a language and ethnic group largely identified with contemporary Nigeria but that is also found in Benin and in the larger regional diaspora.

32 Oguibe, "Photographic Experience," 11.

33 Haney also argues for the centrality of plasticity to early photography in Gold Coast, where her work has focused on the creative interventions made by audiences to early Gold Coast photographs. See Haney, "Film, Charcoal, Time," particularly 120, and "The Lutterodts." In other words, these arguments have been remarkably consistent among scholars working on photography in west Africa across a range of different (sometimes quite distant) geographic and cultural areas.

34 Werner, "Photography and Individualization in Contemporary Africa," 264.

35 The concept of indexicality was devised by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce as part of his well-known theory of the linguistic sign. Although Peirce himself used the photograph to illustrate the concept of the indexical sign,

it was Roland Barthes who brought the concept of the index into contemporary photography theory, in *Camera Lucida*, and Rosalind Krauss who shored up the relationship between photography and the index in contemporary art historical scholarship, in her highly influential two-part essay, "Notes on the Index."

36 See Sekula, "Body and the Archive," and "Traffic in Photographs." Benjamin's texts on photography are anomalous in that they share many of the same Marxist/materialist postulates that have led other thinkers to condemn photography while nonetheless arguing for photography's power to overcome bourgeois consciousness. See Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," and "Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version)."

37 In addition to Sekula and Benjamin, see Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, in which Tagg explores photography's role within the institutions of industrial capital.

38 Sontag, *On Photography*.

39 For a compendium of recent work exemplifying the "affective turn" in photography theory, see Brown and Phu, *Feeling Photography*.

40 See, in particular, Edwards, *Raw Histories*; and Pinney, *Camera Indica*. See also Edwards's edited volume, *Anthropology and Photography: 1860–1920*.

41 See, in particular, Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips, *Sensible Objects*.

42 See Campt, *Image Matters.*

43 Azoulay, *Civil Contract of Photography,* and *Civil Imagination*.

44 Azoulay is not alone in having theorized the relationship between photography, deterritorialization, and rights claims, and these intersections have given rise to several other powerful interventions in the contemporary theory. See, for example, Keenan, "Mobilizing Shame," and Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera*.

45 In her critique of Azoulay's work, Hayes points out that "debates about political and civil imagination may take very different lines" in the so-called Global South than they do in Israel, and she is particularly meticulous in demonstrating the ways in which Azoulay's arguments, about not only citizenship but also photography, are "implicitly lodged within a chain of Euro-American debates about the development of technology in relation to society, culture, and philosophy" (Hayes, "Uneven Citizenry of Photography," 175 and 183, respectively). Phu argues that Azoulay's understanding of citizenship is too narrow to illuminate the particular "linkages between civility and citizenship" that she herself wishes to explore. Phu, *Picturing Model Citizens*, 18–19. Étienne Balibar's theory of transnational citizenship is also apropos here. See, in particular, Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*

46 On the problematic legacies of civility in French colonial territories in Africa, see Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, and Wilder, *French Imperial Nation-State.* See also, again, Hayes, who notes that the tacit slippage from humanism to humanitarianism that takes place, largely under the aegis of "civil imagination," in Azoulay's work obfuscates the rise of new forms of imperialism that have been facilitated by photography in contemporary Africa (Hayes, "Uneven Citizenry of Photography," 185).

47 The *cahier de doléances* was a list of grievances compiled by the provincial governments of France, to be brought before the meeting of the Estates General in

Versailles. On the submission of the Saint-Louis cahier, see Brigaud and Vast, *Saint-Louis du Sénégal*, 59–67.

48 See, again, on the imperial and colonial construction of French Republicanism, Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, and Wilder, *French Imperial Nation-State*.

49 Aïdara, *Saint-Louis du Sénégal d'hier à aujourd'hui*, 10–11. G. Wesley Johnson, in *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, observes that *métis* residents of Saint-Louis held political office prior to the 1789 revolution, noting that "In 1765 a free mulatto named Thévenot was apparently acting as both priest and mayor in Saint-Louis during the British occupation" (22).

50 In fact, many west African poets, philosophers, and intellectuals—and at least some political leaders—had hoped to invent an alternative to the state form in the context of anticolonial struggle, although, by 1960, this battle was basically lost. For a thought-provoking recent treatment of alternatives to the state that were being imagined in French colonial space in this period, see Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

51 See, again, Hayes, who notes that distinctions between the civil, the political, and the national cannot be made outside of a particular context, and that these distinctions are made with "uneven vocalities and temporalities" in different parts of the world (Hayes, "Uneven Citizenry of Photography," 188).

52 Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, 5. For an in-depth discussion of the role of theories of political imagination in political theories of the African state, see the essays collected in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa*, including their introduction to the volume.

53 Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, 5.

54 Mignolo, "Delinking," 450–451.

## Part I Introduction

1 Portriga was released in 1933. For a detailed history of Agfa, see Stenger, *100 Jahre*, 39–40. I am grateful to Lydia Dockx of the FotoMuseum in Antwerp for her help with research on Agfa's corporate history.

2 On the interruption of European consumer imports during the Second World War, see Niang Siga, *Costume Saint-Louisien sénégalais d'hier à aujourd'hui*, 13–15.

3 Stenger, *100 Jahre*, 39. Agfa started life as a German color-dye manufacturer and then merged with the Belgian manufacturer of X-ray films, Gevaert, in 1964.

4 Portriga-Rapid remained exceedingly popular until it was discontinued in 2002.

5 Other scholars have also used the term "democratization" to refer to this process. See Peffer, "Introduction," 17–18; Nimis, "Yoruba Studio Photographers in Francophone West Africa," 135; and Elder, "Capturing Change," 121.

## 1. *Ça bousculait!*

1 Interestingly, Jean-François Werner notes that photographer Cornélius Yao Augustt Azaglo, who opened his studio in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1958 also worked as an accountant while he was apprenticed to a photographer in Bobo-Dioulasso in 1950–55 (Werner, "Photography and Individualization in Contemporary Africa," 252).